

MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE



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Millions watching the Superbowl
unaware it would soon become—
THE MURDER BOWL

—unless someone could stop the
sniper whose sights were trained
on the star quarterback! Only one
man could block Death's touch-
down — redheaded,

MIKE SHAYNE

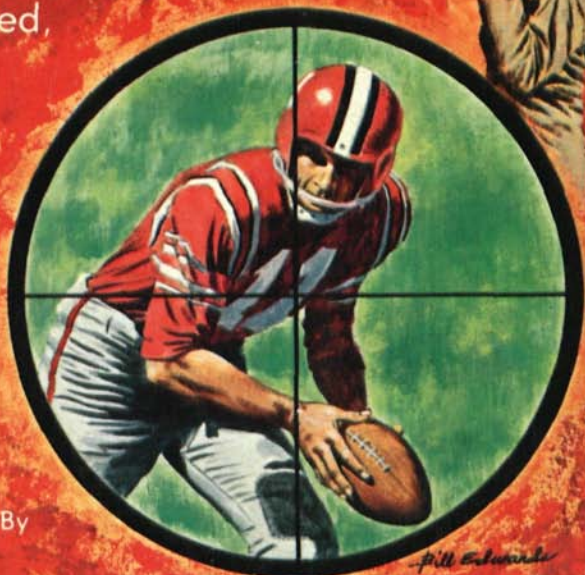
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MIKE SHAYNE



MYSTERY MAGAZINE

JAN., 1975
VOL. 36, NO. 1

NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL

THE MURDER BOWL

by BRETT HALLIDAY

Clever, cold and calculated had been the trap — and totally useless! Not only did Mike Shayne easily escape the firing rifle's range, but so far as he could tell, the trap had been without purpose. A sideline game? Hardly. The tough Miami detective was nearly killed, and even as he puzzled over it, Death dashed for a touchdown!

2 to 52

EXCITING NEW NOVELET

RESCUE OF A BLUE QUEEN

JERRY JACOBSON 70

SPECIAL FEATURE STORY

THE NEPTUNE FUND

EDWARD D. HOCH 53

THRILLING NEW STORIES

DEATH OF A MOTHER'S BOY

HERBERT HARRIS 97

... AND THEN PUT OUT THE LIGHT

C. B. GILFORD 103

SURVIVOR

GARY BRANDNER 114

THE MISSING PISTOL

ARTHUR PORGES 122

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THE NEW, COMPLETE MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL



THE MURDER BOWL

by BRETT HALLIDAY

The fix was in on the Superbowl game, and the only questions were who had fixed it — and how? For Mike Shayne, the stakes were the highest of his career — life and death!



MIKE SHAYNE could hardly have asked for more luxurious confinement. The room was twelve by sixteen and designed to sleep four in comfort. At the far end were a bathroom with shower and compact kitchenette that even included a portable bar. It was, he judged, a very expensive mobile home. Bar and kitchen were well stocked with a variety of frozen foods and unfrozen drinks.

He had been there almost

eighteen hours and it looked as though he was going to remain there indefinitely.

He was madder than hell.

There was no difficulty in opening the door that offered the only way out of this luxury trap. The problem lay in getting out of it alive. Somewhere outside, within easy range, the sniper lurked. Each time Shayne opened the door, even a fraction, the crack of the rifle sounded and a bullet thudded

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with horrifying impact into the heavy steel door frame mere inches above his head.

Shayne's first plan had been to wait until it got dark—but that had proved abortive. Evidently, the sniper had an infra-red telescopic sight that obviated the cloak of night.

He doubted his thus-far invisible jailer wanted to kill him. He could have done that at any time. But the repeated near-misses were too close and too consistent for Shayne not to take the hint.

It had all begun with a call from big, genial Chuck McGraw, proprietor of the Blue Flamingo, Miami's most successful restaurant cafe for the so-called sporting crowd. McGraw had made him a proposition, and the redhead had turned it down out of hand.

"I'm sorry, Chuck," Shayne had said, "but trying to keep that daughter of yours from getting her own way is something I'd call just plain too hot to handle."

The owner took it in good part, ordered Shayne another Martell on the rocks and said, "She's got a lot of her mother in her, Mike—and while Loretta was a living doll, she had the proverbial whim of iron."

"Maggi's no fool," the detective assured him. "She'll see

the light and come around by herself."

They had parted, still friends, and Shayne had walked out of Chuck McGraw's restaurant by the side door—to have a person or persons unknown drop a bag over his head, handcuff him, remove his Remington .38 from its shoulder holster and push him into the back of a car whose motor was already running.

There had been a long ride and then he was led from the car through a door, his handcuffs removed, then shoved face forward on a bed. All in all, it had been the most humiliating experience in Shayne's existence.

Since then, he had been playing peekaboo with the sniper outside.

He wondered if there were more than one—certainly nobody could have remained on duty for eighteen hours continuously and continue to shoot with such unerring accuracy.

Nor was Shayne's frustration lessened by the fact that he had not the slightest idea why he had been kidnapped. He had just completed a not-too-difficult case involving the return of some fabulous diamonds to a plump Chicago widow lady imprudent enough to leave them in her Miami Beach hotel

room rather than in the hotel safe.

For once, there had been no rough stuff involved. His docket was temporarily clear and Shayne had intended to keep it that way until after the Super-bowl game, which pitted the seemingly invincible Miami Dolphins against the colorful and unpredictable Pittsburgh Steelers.

Last year, the redhead had been unable to see the contest—thanks to the intrusion of a kidnapping into which he had been called by the attorneys of a pair of distraught parents whose son had been snatched by a mob of particularly vicious criminals.

Shayne had pulled it off, to the chagrin of the authorities, who had not been invited to join the murderous festivities. But he had missed the game. This year, he intended to see it with Lucy Hamilton from a pair of seats in the front row of the upper tier of the Orange Bowl stands on the forty yard line.

At least, he *had* intended to see it until he found himself trapped in the luxury trailer with the sniper or snipers waiting outside.

Sitting there, he went over for the Nth time Chuck McGraw's proffered assignment, the one he had so sum-

marily turned down. He simply could not see how either his acceptance or refusal of the offer could have resulted in his present plight.

"Mike," the restaurateur had said, "that girl of mine has gone bananas over a good looking character named Larry Dawson. I don't know a damn thing about him except that he doesn't smell right to me."

"I know him—at least I know of him," the detective replied, "and you're right. He's an Australian-born con man with a list of a.k.a.'s as long as my arm."

"That's the more reason for your taking it on, Mike. I thought you were Maggi's friend—and mine."

"I hope I am," Shayne replied, "but I'm no love-life detective. Besides, from what I know of him, the only things he damages are his lady friends' bank accounts."

Maggi McGraw had a penchant for getting into similar romantic scrapes every six months or so, but so far had managed to emerge relatively unscathed. Maggi was beautiful, spoiled and wild as a hawk—but she was neither stupid nor weak save in her choice of men. She liked to skate close to the edge.

To hell with Maggi McGraw right now...!

Shayne had approximately sixteen hours left till kickoff time—and unless he figured a way out of this trap, he might well miss not only the weekend but lose the week that followed as well. Still, he doubted that his snatchers, whoever they were, intended to keep him in this comfortable custody indefinitely.

It didn't make sense. Nothing connected with it made sense. For the fifty-third time, he considered ways and means of smashing through the mobile home wall on the lee side away from the sniper. But the house on wheels was constructed of a singularly tough, if light, stainless steel alloy.

Shayne had to get out of there or come up short in the marbles division. Again, he pondered ways and means. The fact that the sniper did not intend to kill him, but merely to hold him in confinement, did not mean he would hesitate to perforate him if he made a run for it. Until now, this consideration had prevented him from making a rush for it.

The fact that it was dark outside had to be in his favor, of course—once he got out of the line of whatever brand of infra-red gunsight his captor was using. At one in the morning, it would be a lot harder to pick him up again, especially if

he took evasive action, than it would be at one in the afternoon.

Two other factors involved in his captivity troubled him. Why, for example, had they removed his handcuffs? And why had they not locked him securely inside the luxurious stainless-steel trap?

It was almost as if they wanted him to be comfortable and at the same time tantalize him by making escape look relatively easy and render it impossible.

Viewed from this aspect, the whole eerie episode took on the outline of a singularly unfunny practical joke. But who in hell would go to such lengths merely to prevent him from seeing the Superbowl? If, indeed, such was the purpose of the joke. There was also the little matter of why?

The answers to these questions would have to wait until he got out of there. Shayne looked around the compactly equipped luxury cell for something with a long handle, finally found a mop in a small closet recessed in the kitchenette wall.

He was going to put the sniper to the test . . .

Kneeling alongside the door, so that he was sheltered by the mobile home wall, Shayne made sure that the door was

unlatched. Then, lying flat on the thick shag carpeting, he pushed it open with the end of the mop.

The sniper's gun cracked viciously and at the same instant a high-powered slug ricocheted off the top of the door jamb and whined viciously off into the night. Shayne held the door open with the mop handle and waited. There was no other shot. After ten seconds, he withdrew the mop handle and the door swung silently shut of its own accord.

Immediately, he pushed it open again—and again the gun cracked instantly and another bullet sang its song in the darkness. Shayne closed it and opened it again, quickly, and again the rifle cracked its message—but this time the bullet did not ricochet as its predecessors had—it crunched right through the top of the steel door frame and fell to the carpet less than three feet from Shayne's red head, causing the shag carpet to smoulder malodorously with its waning heat.

Shayne rolled to a sitting position and tugged at the lobe of his left ear. There could be only one reason why this bullet had penetrated the wall of his cell on wheels—its path had been prepared by the seventeen slugs that had preceeded it on



his earlier attempted to escape. They had all struck the door frame in exactly the same place!

Son of a bitch! thought the redhead.

He pushed open the door again and this time the slug came right through the door-frame to ricochet off the opposite wall of the trailer before falling to the carpet.

"*Son of a bitch!*" This time Shayne said it aloud.

He propped the door wide open with the mop handle and after the inevitable bullet had spent itself inside the trailer, rose and walked out into the night.

He had little trouble finding the gun once his eyes had adjusted to the starlit night outside. It was mounted in a heavy carpenter's vise set in the rear of a jeep. It was an interesting weapon, a Browning automatic rifle set for single shot fire and equipped with a cylindrical magazine that, he judged, originally had contained fifty cartridges—it should still hold thirty-one.

After disarming the weapon very carefully, he loosened the vise with some difficulty and removed the gun from its improvised mounting. Two small wires ran from its trigger to a small black box on the floor of the jeep.

"*Son of a bitch!*" he said again.

Although he was no electronics expert, Shayne got the pitch. The gun was tuned to a door frame apparatus that caused it to discharge whenever the door was opened from within. He thought of returning to the trailer, which was mounted on sturdy blocks of cement, to find the other end of

the device, decided to hell with it.

Putting the gun on the front seat, Shayne managed to use his limited knowledge of wiring to bypass the jeep's ignition and get its motor going. Then he got in and put the vehicle in motion, following a bumpy rut road that skirted what could only be the edge of that vast inland waterway marked on the maps as the Everglades.

He had no other indication of where he was until the jeep, which roared like a coffee grinder, emerged onto a tar crowned rural road that let him into the small community of Princeton, barely twenty miles south by southwest of Miami, still in Dade County.

He was not feeling exactly proud of himself as he drove the rest of the way back to the city he called home . . .

Although the redhead's enforced asylum of the eighteen hours just past had been fully equipped with frozen strip sirloins one and a half inches thick, plus a wide variety of bottled goods including a fifth of his preferred Martell cognac, Shayne had eaten nothing and drunk only from the ice water tap. He had been far too preoccupied with the single purpose of escaping from the ignominy of his durance to feel either normal hunger or thirst.

II

BY THE TIME Mike Shayne reached the outskirts of town, his stomach was clamoring for food; his soul thirsting for the relaxation only a goodly measure of spirits could provide. Hence, instead of driving straight home to his apartment hotel on East Second Avenue, he detoured to the address from which his inexplicable adventure had begun—the parking lot behind Chuck McGraw's Blue Flamingo Inn.

There, after checking the heavy Browning automatic rifle with a somewhat surprised but resolutely unflustered girl inside the entrance, he stepped through the carpeted foyer into a scene of pre-Superbowl insanity. Although it was past two in the morning, the joint was jumping.

Had Shayne's purpose in coming there been solely to satisfy his appetite for food and drink, he would have driven to the Golden Cock on Biscayne Boulevard, a mere ten minute drive from his apartment, a smaller and more intimate resort where he was almost as much at home as he was in his own apartment. But he had a couple of other fish to fry that indicated his choice of destinations.

For one thing, although

Shayne had declined Chuck McGraw's earnest pleadings to separate the clubowner's daughter, Maggi, from her unsuitable new boyfriend, he considered it obligatory to check in and make sure the girl was not in any real trouble. For the other, by returning to the source spot of his kidnapping, he hoped to uncover some clue as to what it was all about.

McGraw, an ex-athlete run to beef and seemingly inexhaustible outward good humor, greeted him boisterously from the red-leather banquette just inside the entrance that was his regular spot.

"Sit down, Mike," he shouted over the uproar that all but drowned out the loud Rock combo on the stand at the rear of the room. "I've been trying to get you all day. Where the hell have you been?"

"Busy," said Mike Shayne, sitting down in a black walnut armchair a waiter hastily pushed in front of the open end of the banquette. "I see you got Maggi back on your own."

The girl sat next to her father, with a visiting sports columnist crowding her other elbow. Maggi McGraw was a vivid brunette with utterly unexpected green eyes and a mouth that looked made for love. In a sleeveless red dinner gown that revealed far more

sleek sunbronzed flesh than it concealed, her aura of restless vitality virtually extinguished the rest of the small company, which included, apart from her father and the columnist, a handsome and youngish looking Hollywood producer and a spectacular blonde at his elbow.

Maggi leaned across the table, revealing still more of her satiny flesh, to say, "I came back under my own steam, Mike. Don't you think I'm a little too old for the nursery-strings routine?"

"No comment," said Shayne. Then, flashing his own crooked grin, "But I'm glad you and Chuck are back on speaking terms."

"She walked in cool as a cucumber," said her father. "That's why I wanted to get you, Mike—to let you know everything was okay, just in case."

"Did you really look for me?" Maggi asked.

Shayne returned her full candlepower with his own, said, "Maggi, I'm damned if I know."

The brilliant green eyes fell away from his own and he thought he detected a certain wariness behind them as she said, "Now what does that mean? I wish people would stop talking in riddles."

The conversation grew general once more as Shayne con-

centrated on his inner self. Ignoring the appallingly high price list on the right hand side of the huge hand-printed carte, since he intended to stick his host with this one, Shayne ordered a double Martell on the rocks, plus a sixteen ounce top sirloin steak, blood rare. The trimmings he also ordered included O'Brien potatoes, grilled mushroom caps, hot French rolls split and toasted and a double order of French fried onion rings.

While he waited for the arrival of the food, Shayne finished his drink and ordered another and listened to the eddies of conversation around him. Most of it concerned the upcoming Superbowl Game and what the stellar performance of the Dolphin backfield would do compared to the impending accomplishments of Pittsburgh's Terry Bradshaw and Franco Harris. Odds were quoted, both over the banquette and all around it, arguments developed and bets were offered, bargained for and taken.

Miami was an overwhelming favorite on the comparative season's records of the two clubs, but the visiting Hollywood producer, whose name was Harlan Marshall, was eagerly snapping up Dolphin wagers at seemingly ridiculously low odds. He was quietly hand-

some, expensively and casually groomed in the West Coast manner, an island of unshakable assurance in the ocean of pre-game uncertainties that surrounded the little party.

Marshall was laying his money, in large amounts, on the Pittsburgh underdogs, to the joy of the home team rooters. They came and went in an erratic stream. His blonde companion, whose profusion of beads and bracelets and golden chain ornaments caused her to resemble a Christmas tree, sat silent, downing her drinks impassively.

When someone spoke to her, she turned her golden head slowly in response, although her expression did not alter. As the light struck her in near-profile, the redhead felt a curious stir of recognition. It was as if he knew, or had known, this woman—yet he knew perfectly well that he had never before seen her in the flesh.

Hollywood . . . Shayne wondered. Somehow, he did not in his fugitive memory associate her with dramatics. Whatever the link was, it tied her to physical violence. Yet there was no question of her being very much a woman. Beneath the baubles with which it was bedecked lurked a magnificently feminine figure.

Her features were per-

fection—almost too perfect for Shayne's taste. He was reminded of a Galatea whose being brought to life by the goddess had been left incomplete. So why did he associate her with violence?

He was still pondering the irrelevant problem when a waiter captain whisked the silvered lid from a sizable* hot platter on which Shayne's steak and fixings reposed in steaming redolence. The detective felt his empty stomach growl happily in anticipation. He picked up a steel knife and sliced through the charcoaled surface to reveal a blood-red rareness of finely textured steer beef . . .

. . . just as a red-jacketed servitor somehow found room on the crowded board to place a portable telephone in front of him and say softly in his right ear, "For you, Mr. Shayne."

"Mike Shayne?" The voice had the stamp of controlled authority, somehow enhanced rather than lessened by the high nasal twang generally associated with the Prairie states.

"Speaking." Shayne's voice was thicker than usual thanks to the spate of salivary juices that filled his mouth, induced by sight and scent of the luscious food slowly cooling on the platter in front of him.

"Art Havemeyer here. We're at the Bonanza Biltmore, suite

seventeen-E. Can you get over here right away?"

Shayne's stomach clamoured audibly. He said, "As soon as I wrap myself around a steak."

"There's no time—I've been trying to get hold of you since yesterday afternoon. The matter is urgent—very urgent."

Had it been almost anyone else, up to and including the President of the United States, Shayne would have told him to sit on his hands until the steak and all its trimmings were demolished. But the redhead recognized both the name and the voice that went with it.

Art Havemeyer was general manager of the Miami Professional Football Club and Shayne had seen and heard him on at least a dozen television news and talk shows over the past three years, since Havemeyer had assumed the reins of the Dolphins.

The urgency of his tone, plus the fact that the detective, along with virtually every male resident in Miami and Miami Beach had become a rabid Dolphin fan, caused him to hesitate before delivering his response.

Havemeyer said, "Don't worry, Shayne, you'll find it very much worth your while."

"Who do I have to kill?" said the redhead.

"Nobody—no violence in-

volved. But you're needed—*badly.*"

Shayne sighed, but he said, "I'm on my way, Mr. Havemeyer."

He put the handset down hard in its cradle, motioned the waiter to take it away, Rising, he said, "Anyone for a sirloin steak?"

"You're not leaving *now*?" Chuck McGraw looked and sounded incredulous.

"Duty and dollars call," said Shayne. He looked for Maggi, discovered that at some point in the last few minutes, she had slipped from the booth. "See you at the Superbowl," he said to the others and was rewarded by a nod from Harlan Marshall, who was in the act of laying more money on the Pittsburgh team. The blonde at his elbow remained a vacuum. Damn! Where, and when, did she jog his memory?

As he left the Blue Flamingo's aura of expensive good cheer, Shayne felt cross as a ten-year-old robbed of a candy bar. Dammit, he was hungry and the two double brandies had gone slightly to his head, which was usually rock hard where liquor was concerned.

The parking attendant was busy and Shayne decided to look for his own car in the still-crowded lot. He spotted the



jeep first and walked toward it, then remembered that he had left his car in the lot overnight, thanks to his kidnapping of two afternoons before. He decided to hell with the jeep and, looking around, spotted his own vehicle parked against the rear wall in the southeast corner.

He walked to it, making some small effort to keep his gait steady, discovered the doors were locked, swore again. He cursed his own stupidity. The attendant knew his car, had locked it for protective purposes. Which meant that the jeep would also be locked now. He began to walk back

toward the porte cochere of the club, cursing the futility of his effort, saw the attendant back at his lighted post by the entrance and waved at the scarlet jacketed figure.

The boy plucked some keys from the board on which they were hung on hooks and moved toward him—just as two converged on Shayne from an adjoining lane of other parked cars. The detective whirled to meet their attack, his right hand flashing to his shoulder holster and, of course, coming up empty.

For this was no kid-glove kidnapping like the earlier successful attempt. He spotted brass knuckles on the right fist of one of his attackers, what looked like a slungshot in the right hand of the other. These men, whoever they were, were out for blood—for Mike Shayne's blood.

His adrenals pumping, the detective evaded the first swing of the blackjack, dropping to one knee as it whistled past his left ear, even as he made a grab for the man with the knucks. But the gravel footing betrayed him as he half-rose. His feet skidded out from under him and he came down hard on the parking lot surface.

It stunned him a moment.

Shayne was in bad trouble and he knew it.

III

THANKS TO his slip, the blow the man with the brass knuckles swung at his head missed its target. It whistled past Mike Shayne's temple to land on his left shoulder. Even though he was covered there by the empty leather holster, the force of the blow sent him sprawling sideways on the graveled surface. He rolled away as the first assailant chopped downward with the slungshot, which made a dull thud on the parking lot.

At this point, the parking lot attendant uttered a yell and launched himself into the fray—to receive a sickening blow in the stomach from the man with the knucks that doubled him up like a jackknife. But the diversion gave the red-head an opportunity.

Rolling onto his back, Shayne hooked his left foot around the blackjack wielder's left ankle from behind and drove his right heel hard into the back of the man's knee.

This attacker uttered a howl of pain and pitched forward, to strike his forehead violently against the tonneau of a gleaming Rolls Royce Silver Phantom. His slingshot went flying through the air and the red-head managed to catch it before it struck the ground, whirling as he rose in a crouch.

He was barely able to duck another blow with the brass knuckles and lashed out with the blackjack—but his attacker took evasive action and managed to dodge the blow. He took off, following his companion, who had bounced off the Rolls and was also in flight, slowed by his damaged left knee.

Shayne's first impulse was to pursue them, but the parking lot attendant was on the gravel, holding his gut with both hands and making sounds that indicated he was violently sick to his stomach. The red-head hesitated, and the moment of indecision cost him his chance to retaliate. The sudden sharp sound of automobile tires peeling rubber and the roar of a powerful motor indicated that the goons were on their way.

They took off in a dark Continental as if every motorcycle cop in Miami were after them, barely missed a car entering the parking lot and skidded safely out of sight.

The detective hoisted the attendant to his feet, discovered him to be relatively undamaged, slipped him twenty dollars, retrieved his own car keys where the boy had dropped them, and was on his own way.

The entire assault and repulse had consumed relatively little time, but when he reached suite seventeen-E at

the Bonanza Biltmore across the viaduct on the Beach Strip, Art Havemeyer, who answered his ring, said, "What took you so long?"

Shayne was surprised by the size of the Dolphin general manager. In most of the television news shots the redhead had seen of him, Havemeyer had been dwarfed by the giant gladiators alongside of him. But he matched the detective's six feet one and, in a pink silk shirt and maroon slacks, his bulk looked rock hard. Save for an unabashed bald spot on his head, he might have been a pro-footballer himself.

"Come in, come in," he added, without waiting for Shayne to explain his delay. "Christ, I'm glad you finally got here. I've got to look in at a late rally up the Strip and I don't dare leave my guys on their own."

Shayne, after obeying Havemeyer's motion to sit on one of the room's twin sofas, said, "Would you mind telling me what in hell this is all about?"

The general manager said, his brown eyes hard as two brown bullets, "Are you always so hard to reach? I've been trying to get hold of you since early yesterday morning."

Shayne said, "Not usually."

"Christ!" said Havemeyer,

stroking his balding pate. "Not even your girl knew where you were."

"That makes three of us," said Shayne.

"Here's the pitch," said Havemeyer. "You remember last year when a couple of lookalikes ran up those nightclub tabs in the names of Czerniki and Dinsmore?"

Shayne nodded, said, "I thought Will Gentry's bunco boys wrapped that one up."

"They did, ultimately. But the stories didn't do us any good. A lot of the fans got down on us as a playboy club. Even some of the guys on the squad weren't sure. If we hadn't got lucky and won all the marbles, we could have been in real trouble."

Shayne remembered the story. In mid-season, a pair of bums, one of whom bore a passing resemblance to the Dolphins' great bone-crushing fullback, Stan Czerniki, while the other decided he could get by as Czerniki's equally famed halfback-partner, Bill Dinsmore, had begun making the Miami rounds, freeloadng on the two stars' local adulation to run up huge scores in food, drink and willing females.

Rumors of the backs' supposed playboy activities after hours had reached the gossip columns and the television

sports commentaries. The resulting reaction, as Havemeyer suggested, was not good for the team. Although the imposters were caught and brought to speedy justice, the rumor that the Dolphin backs were a pair of cutups off-field had stubbornly refused to remain buried.

Shayne said, "Don't tell me we've got a repeat performance. I thought those two characters were still in jail."

"They are," said Havemeyer. "I checked that out as soon as things started to smell."

"Well. . . ?" said the redhead. "What do you want me to do?"

"Just like I told you—babysit with the boys till I get back here. Then go out and find out what's cooking."

"What makes you think anything is?" said Shayne.

"I can feel it. For one thing, there's too much smart Steeler loot around—at odds not justified by the comparative records of the two clubs. For another, when I tried to check that out in certain quarters, there was too damned much ignorance. You know how close-mouthed most big-time gamblers are when a deal is cooking. Well, everybody is willing to talk, but nobody knows anything."

"That still seems pretty thin to me. Why not just keep your

boys under lock and key and let the game take care of itself?"

"All right—so, I'm a mother hen. But that goes with the job. Listen, Shayne, the club will pay you five big ones just to be on the job till the game is over tomorrow—ten if you come up with anything."

"I hate to take the money," said the detective. "No, that's a lie and we both know it. But it's a hell of a lot for babysitting."

"It's worth it, for my peace of mind," said Havemeyer. "And, if you do come up with something, it could be a lifesaver."

Shayne thought it over. He said, "I'll take it. Mind you, I'm promising nothing, but I'll do what I can. I'm a Dolphin fan, too."

"That's all I ask," said the general manager. They shook hands on it.

Shayne said, "What about your own security people, and what about the police?"

Havemeyer explained what was being done. When he finished, Shayne said, "I don't know what I can do that these people can't."

"You can find out what's cooking—that's all. I'll give you ten to one something is."

The redhead considered the way movie man Harlan Marshall had been putting his money on Pittsburgh at the

Blue Flamingo. He thought about his own inexplicable snatch to the mobile home on the rim of the Everglades.

Shayne said, "Did you tell anybody you were going to put me on your payroll?"

"Jesus—I probably did. I don't know. Sure, I talked it over."

"Who with?"

The Dolphin general manager's brow wrinkled with thought. He said, "That's a tough one. Your name came up a couple of nights ago—somebody was talking about one of your cases. I knew you by reputation, of course, so I decided you might be the man I wanted. I was already worried about the Pittsburgh money that was turning up. I tried to get hold of you then, but nobody knew where you were."

"Who told you I was at the Blue Flamingo just now?"

"One of the waiter captains. Chuck McGraw's a friend of mine. He knew I looking for you." A pause, then, "Why the interrogation?"

"If I told you, you wouldn't believe it," said Shayne. "Where are the boys?"

For answer, Havemeyer strode to a door and flung it open, motioned the detective to follow him, led the way into another living room of the penthouse suite. Three young

men, in various states of undress, were watching a late late show on a large television screen, a Japanese monster film.

"Men," said Havemeyer, "this is Mike Shayne, the detective. He's going to play den mother till I get back. If I hear of any of you getting out of line, it's coming out of your Bowl checks. Okay?"

He took off.

Stan Czerniki loomed over the redhead by a good three inches. Even without his playing pads, he looked big and bulky for a man of such quickness and speed onfield. His sunbronzed face showed interest as he gave Shayne a bear-hug, lifting him off the carpet as easily as a child lifting a teddy bear.

He said, "Look what we got, fellows—our own private eye!"

Bill Dinsmore, looking relatively small at six feet even and a lean one-eighty-five, said, "Put him down, you Polack. You heard what the man said."

"Aw." Czerniki's teeth showed beneath his mustache as he grinned and said, "Aw, I was just seeing if he lifted easy."

Shayne was in no mood for the high jinks of overgrown children. As the big fullback lowered him, he carefully planted a hard left toe in

Czerniki's Achilles tendon, causing him to collapse on the carpet like a sack of wheat. At once, Bill Dinsmore was crowding the redhead, saying, "If you've hurt the big boy, I'm going to take you apart."

Shayne stood his ground, said, "He'll be okay in a couple of minutes."

"He'd better be, or . . ."

The tension was eased as a coal black man in a bright chrome yellow sports shirt rose from an armchair and said, "For Chrissakes, fellows, ease off. I saw what he did." He bent over the big fullback, helped hoist him to his feet, revealing amazing fluid strength for the smallest man in the room—a mere five eleven or so—weighing less than Bill Dinsmore.

This was Ollie Clayton, the third of the Dolphins' great running backs, an ebony wraith onfield who alternated on offensive plays with the white halfback. His talents were those of an electric eel—almost uncatchably slippery with a shock in his tail.

Clayton said, after depositing Czerniki on a sofa and shepherding Dinsmore to a chair, "Sorry, Mr. Shayne, but we're all uptight."

"So what else is new?" said the detective, dropping into another chair. The moment of

tension was past. It had been, the redhead knew, a mere outbreak of game-eve hypertension.

Shayne said, after taking a look around, "Where's Bassett? I should think he'd be with you."

"Aw, Bill's home with the wife and kiddies—as usual," said Czerniki rubbing the back of his left ankle. "Not even Art Havemeyer has the clout to pry him loose."

"Besides," said Bill Dinsmore, "nobody ever went around writing bum checks on *him* as a playboy."

"Not Bill—you can bet on it," said Czerniki. "His idea of a night on the town is a hamburger joint and a movie with the family."

"Amen!" said Ollie Clayton.

IV

THE SUBJECT OF their chatter was the Dolphins' great veteran quarterback. After mediocre success with two other big league clubs, Bassett had come into his own when the Miami team picked him up in a trade. More than one sports commentator had quite justly referred to him as the catalyst that had sparked the team's recent and rapid rise to supremacy.

By repute, the play caller was a cool, computer brained

performer who could pick apart the seams in a zone defense like a fine tailor removing the sacking from a suit in the process of creation. He knew the foibles of the opposition defense as well as those of his own teammates like the back of his own right hand. He was shifty of foot, unerring of aim, unflappable in crises that caused other fine quarterbacks to make the mistakes that led to costly turnovers.

With the three players in the room, moving behind a huge and efficient offensive line and a trio of greatly gifted wide receivers, glue-fingered tight ends and a strong bench, Bassett made up the Miami attack, an attack that had enabled the Dolphins to pile up the longest winning streak in more than half a century of big-time professional football, fast becoming a legend.

Shayne pondered the fact that Art Havemeyer had not put him in protective custody with his other star backs, decided that was the general manager's decision, that he probably knew what he was doing.

While his companions chatted in fits and starts, mostly during the late movie's commercial breaks, Shayne tried to consider how he was going to attack the indefinite assign-



ment the general manager had given him.

Havemeyer was probably right, he decided, in sensing that some sort of major gambling coup was in the making. It could hardly be considered unusual with the kind of money a Superbowl game attracted, especially one where the odds on the favorite were prohibitive. Whether or not the general manager was correct in assuming that it posed a serious threat to any of his players was something else.

That, of course, was what Havemeyer wanted Shayne to find out. For a ten grand fee, it was certainly worth the old college try. The problem was—how to go about it?

The redhead considered again

the mystery of his own kidnapping. Somebody certainly wanted him out of the way for a limited time. Had whoever it was wanted him out of the way permanently, there had been plenty of opportunity.

Evidently such had not been the case. Even the parking lot assault at the Blue Flamingo, while brutal, had not apparently been lethal in intent. Had it been, the goons, one of them anyway, could simply have sniped him dead at close range from the cover of the parked cars.

It was at the Blue Flamingo where he had witnessed the bets being made by Harlan Marshall, the movie maker from the Coast. Also, according to Art Havemeyer, it was in Chuck McGraw's plush tavern that Shayne's name had arisen and the general manager had decided to use him on the case.

It fitted together. Not, perhaps, tightly enough to hold water in a law court, but enough to go along on as more than a hunch. He wondered about McGraw—and about the supposed elopement of Maggi McGraw with con man Larry Dawson. If Shayne had accepted the assignment, would he have been kidnapped? Or would he have been sent off on some wild goose chase that would have kept him out of

town until the Bowl Game was over?

Probably, the latter, he decided.

Right now, the people he wanted to see were the McGraws, Chuck and Maggi, Larry Dawson and Harlan Marshall—not necessarily in that order. Also another large steak and trimmings like the one he had been forced to abandon so rudely at the Blue Flamingo . . .

Shayne picked up a telephone and called Lucy Hamilton, to let her know he was okay. She sounded miffed, especially when he would not go into detail about the last twenty-four hours.

"You could have called," she said.

"No I couldn't," he told her.

She hung up after a curt goodnight and Shayne sighed. He had an idea Lucy suspected he had been with another woman. "Hung for a goat," he told himself.

When Art Havemeyer returned, the redhead got out of the hotel in a hurry. He had only a little more than ten hours till kickoff time. He had a hunch they were going to be busy ones . . .

Shayne's first stop was the Golden Cock, only a relatively few blocks from his home. And there, as he expected, he found

his tall, cadaverous friend, Tim Rourke in his customary rear booth. Veteran ace reporter of the *Miami News*, Rourke had a finger on more of Miami's myriad pulses than any other man in the detective's experience. Furthermore, Shayne and Rourke were old and close friends and drinking companions, with absolute trust in one another.

"Where the hell were you last night?" the reporter asked as Shayne slid into the opposite bench of the booth.

"Duck-shooting in the Everglades," said the detective who was getting tired of the question.

"Duck-shooting?" Rourke looked his disbelief.

"Yeah," said Shayne. "Only this time I was the duck."

"Oh-oh!" The reporter's eyebrow rose a notch. "I was looking for you like crazy. By the way, so was Lucy."

"What's up, Doc?"

Rourke shrugged as he speared the last bite of his double-thick lamb chop mixed grill, and Shayne's stomach performed a series of aerobatics. The reporter chewed, swallowed, took a pull on his highball before he answered. He said, "I wanted you to check out a story for me. Somebody's rigging a setup for the game tomorrow."

"Any idea who?" Shayne's ears pricked up as the well-trained waitress placed a double Martell on the rocks in front of him.

"The flap is, a guy named Larry Dawson has set up a syndicate to grab all the Dolphin money they can get. The town is awash with Steeler bread. Now why would anybody in his right mind bet on the Steelers? Unless . . ." Rourke let it tail off.

Shayne nodded, said, "Where in hell can I find Dawson—without going through too many channels?"

"You might try Number Four bungalow at the Rockfort, Mike," said the reporter. "He's been set up there for the last ten days."

"Did you crack it?" the redhead asked.

"Christ, I tried. But I made the mistake of asking at the hotel desk. They deny he's ever been registered there. But my source, one of the room service waiters, says different."

Shayne nodded, then said, "I'd go right now, but if I don't get myself wrapped around a steak I'll keel over."

He slid to the edge of the booth to flag a waitress, but Rourke said, "Save your energy. The kitchen's closed."

The redhead cursed softly but vehemently. A glance at his

wristwatch told him the bitter truth. He said, "Thank you, Timothy—thank you very much."

"Don't thank me. Thank the management," said Rourke.

Shayne downed his drink, put the eight-ounce glass down hard, got up.

"Hey!" said the reporter. "You just got here."

"Continued in our next," said the redhead. "I'm hunting an all night hamburger stand."

But outside, behind the wheel of his car, his pangs of hunger subsided temporarily and his search for food somehow led him to the Viaduct. Before he knew it, Shayne was headed back for the strip with its monumental jagged palisade of tall hotel towers still silhouetted in light against the dark night sky. Hell, he thought, he might as well run up to the Rockfort and see Larry Dawson.

Since he was working on the idea that his kidnapping and the gambling operation were somehow allied, and since Dawson seemed very close to the epicenter, he considered what he knew of the superslick confidence man. Viewed in this way, the circumstances of his snatch became more credible.

Larry Dawson was Australian born, a few years beyond the thirties barrier. He

had been in and out of trouble with the police in both hemispheres since his middle teens, which made him a twenty-year veteran of crime. To date, he had spent little if any time in prison, apart from juvenile sentences, although his career had embraced a wide variety of felonies and misdemeanors, ranging from cracking hotel safes to operating a streamlined badger game with rich women, rather than wealthy men, as his targets.

Almost invariably, according to what Shayne had heard of the man, his operations were profitable. But Dawson was almost always in need of funds. He lived high, wide and handsome and had a predilection for unloading his ill-gotten gains at the nearest roulette table almost as fast as he took them in.

More important to Shayne, Dawson had never been accused of committing a crime of violence—and his misdoings were more often than not accompanied by a bottomless ingenuity and a prankish high style that had made him the despair of humorless officialdom. The curious rigging of the set B.A.R. outside the windless trailer in which Shayne had been confined was quite in keeping with Dawson's M.O.

Furthermore, it gave the

otherwise inexplicable event a reasonable motivation. Thanks to Maggi McGraw, it was entirely possible that he had found out in advance the girl's father intended to put Shayne on his daughter's trail—and this at a time when Dawson's activities could least endure even random investigation.

Avoiding the Rockfort lobby desk, Shayne walked directly from the rear parking lot to the carefully landscaped area where the costly bungalows were located. He found Number Four with no difficulty, since the curtained windows were still aglow, punched the front doorbell.

Larry Dawson, elegant in shirtsleeves and slacks, opened the door and beamed at the detective.

"Come on in, Mike," he said in his Down Under accent. "I've been worried about you."

V

THE MAN RADIATED charm. Perhaps Mike Shayne should have expected it in view of Dawson's reputation, but he was hardly prepared for such amiability. Nor was the scene in the bungalow quite what he had foreseen.

The only other person present in the luxuriously appointed little house was green-

eyed, sultry mouthed Maggi McGraw, who sat curled in a corner of the huge sofa, coddling a half-empty highball. She had shed her revealing dinner gown for an even more revealing décolletage.

Save that Maggi was hardly the average man's vision of a domestic animal, the atmosphere was positively cozy. As Dawson ushered him to an overstuffed armchair that faced the sofa across a long glass-topped coffee table, the redhead wondered if the whole bit weren't a put-on. But, unless Tim Rourke had tipped off his host, how could they possibly have known he was coming here now—especially when he had not known it himself until he turned north after crossing the Viaduct?

A good question, the redhead thought, a very good question. But his host and hostess gave no evidence of being surprised by his arrival, unannounced, so late in the early morning. What the hell, he thought, he might as well take the offensive.

Shayne said, "Larry, why in hell did you have me snatched the other afternoon?"

The Australian shrugged, then confirmed Shayne's suspicions by replying, "Come on, Mike! For certain delicate reasons I feel certain you un-

derstand, this seemed a very poor time to have a fly of your known ability buzzing around in my affairs. As soon as Maggi here tipped me, I made the arrangements. Believe me, digger, I did my best to keep you comfortable."

"Comfort was not exactly the word for it," said the redhead. "And what about that second assault in the Blue Flamingo parking lot tonight?"

A shadow flickered across Dawson's erratically handsome face. He said, "That was not my doing—nor was there any need. But some of the principals involved in this deal have little or no understanding of the theory of good sportsmanship. Please accept my sincere apologies. I gave no orders to play rough with you."

"Besides," said Maggi McGraw, speaking for the first time, "you managed them well enough."

Her green eyes met Shayne's gaze unfathomably. He said, "With the help of the parking attendant. I hope he won't be penalized for saving me from a fractured skull."

"Don Quixote," the girl said lazily. "Lester always wants to help people in trouble."

Shayne turned back to the Australian, said, "Larry, one thing troubles me—why would anyone in his right mind lay

big money on the Steelers team?"

A derisive half-smile crossed Dawson's face. He said, "The odds, man—consider the odds."

Shayne said, "The Pittsburgh money I watched tonight wasn't paying much attention to the odds."

This time, Dawson and Maggi exchanged a glance that had trouble in it. The girl said, "What do you mean, Mike?"

He said, "You were there, Maggi. You saw the way Harlan Marshall was gobbling up Miami bets. He was taking any odds. It didn't make sense unless . . ."

"Unless what?" Dawson's voice sharpened.

"Unless he knew he was betting on a sure thing," said the redhead.

Dawson grinned cheerfully, said, "That's the whole trick if you can turn it—make the suckers believe they have a sure thing. Then take the money and laugh all the way to the bank."

"Then you're betting the Dolphins?"

"Of course." It was a little too prompt, a little too easily delivered. The detective felt certain Dawson was lying.

Shayne said, "I don't suppose you'd care to tell me what your convincer is."

"Hardly," said Dawson. "But you're quite free to guess. You

lays your money and you takes your choice."

Behind his amiability, the Australian was laughing at him. Shayne sensed that, whatever the fix was, it was already in. There seemed little sense in wasting more time with these two. He doubted that even physical force would get the answers he needed from Larry Dawson, or the girl.

As he drove the two miles down the glittering Strip to the Bonanza Biltmore, Shayne was quite certain that Art Havemeyer, with his three ace running backs in protective custody, was guarding a figurative barn door locked long after the horses were stolen.

Nor did the Dolphin General Manager's reply when the red-head asked him the big question put his apprehensions to rest.

"How many ways are there to throw a football game?" Havemeyer countered. "How many acorns are there on an oak tree? You couldn't count them with a computer."

"Try a few," said the detective.

"Okay, but it won't help." The two men were alone in the room of the suite where they had first talked while, presumably, the three gladiators slept behind locked bedroom doors.

Then Havemeyer said, "All



right, you've got maybe sixty people directly involved on each side in a pro ball game, counting the coaching staff, the trainers and the players—more, if you count the inevitable handful who are hurt and can't play. Granting your hypothesis that one or more of them could be reached, you can multiply that to infinity."

"Take one position," said Shayne.

"All right then—how about the offensive center? How many people can watch him if they try? But he can screw up your whole attack without even being suspected. He holds his pass to the quarterback a fraction of a second too long on a few key third down plays and your boy gets dumped for a loss—or a handoff is mistimed

and a play fouled up. Or a bad pass on a punt could do it. Or a too-quick release to the quarterback."

Shayne thought that over, shook his head, said, "I see what you mean."

"You got the feeling, too?" Art Havemeyer chewed on his unlit Uppmann.

"That the fix is somewhere?" Shayne countered. Then he nodded and told of his visit to Larry Dawson and what he knew of the man.

The General Manager sighed gloomily, then said, "I'll stake every cent I've got—that nobody on the squad has been reached. Have you any idea how carefully we check out every man on the payroll both before we hire him and afterward—and that includes the fourth locker-room assistant, the one whose job it is to see that the uniforms are laundered and the equipment in shape?"

"Some," said the redheaded detective.

"The F.B.I. isn't in it compared to us," said Havemeyer. "We know when they were weaned, who changed their diapers, their childhood diseases. And I'm not exaggerating by much. We know our people—and so, with a couple of exceptions, does every other organization in the league. And Pittsburgh is not one of them."

Shayne said, "Do you know Harlan Marshall?"

"I've met him. He's here, taking some special footage for a football documentary. Why? What's he got to do with the problem?"

Shayne shrugged. "All I know is he was betting on the Steelers like he was afraid he couldn't lose his money fast enough."

Havemeyer spread his hands, said, "Maybe he's trying to unload for an income tax write-off. Some of those Hollywood boys still make loot you wouldn't believe. Maybe he's some kind of a real Steeler fan who feels he has to put his bread where his mouth is. Or maybe..."

It was Havemeyer's turn to let it trail off.

"... or maybe he's in on the fix. Maybe he knows what it is anyway."

"Maybe, maybe, maybe..." Havemeyer glowered at Shayne, added, "I don't want maybes from you, I want facts. So far, you haven't got any."

"If they're there, I'll get them," the redhead promised.

"We both know they're there," said Havemeyer. "The time element's the problem. We're damn near out of it. Why in hell couldn't I get hold of you when I wanted you?"

"I'm beginning to think it

was because somebody didn't want you to," said Shayne. He told Havemeyer, for the first time, about his strange kidnapping of the day before yesterday.

Havemeyer's first reaction was an incredulous, "You're putting me on!" Then he began to think about it, and the more he thought about it, the less he liked it. Finally, he said, "What in hell can we do? I'm not beefing, but I'm up a tree."

"From what you told me earlier about your security arrangements, you've got everybody under some kind of protective surveillance. Right?"

"That's right." Havemeyer picked up the idea. "You want me to check them out?"

"Right now," said the redhead. "If anybody's been physically tampered with, let's find it out. At least, we'll be sure of that end of the problem for now."

"I'll put security on it," Havemeyer lifted the phone at his elbow, gave the necessary orders, listened, hung up. To Shayne he said, "Everybody okay at five a.m. But they're going to keep running checks every hour instead of every four hours till game time."

"Which key player could hurt you the most if he got sabotaged—Bill Bassett?"

"I suppose so. But Jack

Fayette can move the club. Maybe he's almost as old as Blanda, but he can do the job. He showed us early this season, the four games Bassett was out with the bum shoulder."

Shayne felt his stomach beginning to hurt. He said, "Is the Dolphin exchequer good for a room service steak? I haven't eaten in over two days."

"Go ahead," said Havemeyer. "You've earned that much anyway—even at today's prices."

Shayne was not sure how the General Manager meant the remark, but the clamoring emptiness of his stomach was beyond the call of pride. Again he ordered a sixteen ounce blood-rare sirloin with all the trimmings—and this time he was able to devour it without interruption.

Not that he was idle during the precious forty minutes it took for preparation and delivery of the steer beef, or the twenty minutes it took the detective to wolf it down. During that time, he placed a call to Mick Finlayson, a highly reputable colleague in Los Angeles. Under the circumstances, he felt no compunction in rousing him from slumber at the unseemly hour of two a.m., Pacific Time, three hours earlier than the Miami time registered on Shayne's wristwatch.

He was finishing the mop-up job on his steak when the operator ran Finlayson to earth in his girlfriend's apartment and completed the call. The Los Angeles private eye sounded grumpy at being disturbed in his pleasure, but the redhead ignored his mood.

"Mick," he said, "What do you know about a documentary filmmaker named Harlan Marshall?"

"Not a damn thing," Finlayson replied. "What do you want to know?"

"Anything you can get."

"At this hour of the morning?" Finlayson sounded incredulous.

Shayne briefed him lightly, stressing the fact that it had to do with the Superbowl that afternoon, added, "Nobody here seems to know much about him except that he's taking special film of the game and betting heavily on the Steelers."

Finlayson replied, "If he knows a way to fix a game with a camera, let me in on it. If not, have him locked up. Besides, who gives a damn? The Rams aren't in it."

He agreed, however, to get to work on it, for a flat five hundred dollar fee, and promised a call-back at noon, Miami time.

"That's cutting it pretty thin," Havemeyer remarked

when Shayne returned the phone to its cradle.

"Plus being a hell of a bag of loot to put out on what is probably a wild goose chase."

"Then why do it?" Havemeyer asked.

"If Marshall is in on the fix, whatever it is," said the redhead, "there's just a chance he may have left a lead uncovered and Mick may dig it up."

"But at noon..." Havemeyer shook his head. "The game begins at one-fifteen."

VI

MIKE SHAYNE shrugged his big shoulders. Having arranged for this check-out, he put it out of mind. His immediate desire was to get some sleep now that his stomach was full, but there was no time for sleep. He was becoming increasingly curious about Chuck McGraw's possible involvement in whatever was happening.

The owner of the Blue Flamingo, or at least his restaurant, seemed to be very close to the focal point of what had happened thus far. Shayne's strange kidnapping had taken place in his parking lot, as had the second assault from which he had so narrowly escaped. It was there that Harlan Marshall had been taking any and all bets on the Dol-

phins. And McGraw's beautiful wayward daughter was certainly involved with the charming Larry Dawson, who had admitted being in on the fix.

But McGraw's reputation was such that the detective had not turned toward him earlier. Big, jovial, trusted by friends and customers alike, he had, for a period of more than ten years, operated the best known resort for sportsmen, sports fans and theatrical personalities who enjoyed association with athletes, in the entire city of Miami.

Not once had his reputation suffered even indirectly from rumored association with any sort of shady deal. If his origins were rough and tumble, McGraw had long since outgrown them. He was frequently referred to as the Toots Shor of Biscayne Bay.

Shayne liked Chuck McGraw, as did everybody else who knew him. He had taken it for granted that occasional swift-buck deals were completed in the Blue Flamingo—but he had equally taken it for granted that the big Irishman had never been involved in them. Still . . . it was time the two men had a talk.

Shayne called the club before leaving Havemeyer's suite at the Bonanza Biltmore. Although it was after hours for nightlife in Miami, he had a

strong hunch that the Blue Flamingo would be open all night, at least for the private pre-Super Bowl party he had seen developing during his earlier visit to the sporting resort.

His hunch paid off. The club was still operating—he could hear the sounds of hilarity in his ear as one of McGraw's assistants answered his call—but the owner-operator was not there.

"Where can I find him? This is Mike Shayne speaking."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Shayne," was the reply, "but he left about ten minutes ago." A pause, then with a note of surprise, "He was on his way to meet you."

Shayne was stopped cold. He said, "Did he tell you where he was going?"

The assistant manager said, "Sorry, Mr. Shayne, but there's a great deal of noise here. Did you ask where Mr. McGraw was meeting you?"

"That's right," said Shayne, a worried presentiment forming a cold lump in his recently filled stomach.

"I believe he mentioned your place," said the other. Then, "But surely you must know where you . . ."

"I didn't issue the invitation," snapped Shayne. He hung up, got to his feet.

Havemeyer looked up at him curiously, said, "Trouble?"

"Perhaps." The redhead let it go at that, added, "I'll be in touch."

Havemeyer said, "We'll be at the stadium by eleven o'clock."

Shayne acknowledged the information from the doorway on his way out for an elevator. If the suite had not been on the hotel's fourteenth floor, he would have taken the stairs. As it was, the lift seemed to take forever in coming.

In the matter of moments, he took off in his car like a rocket and again sped over the Causeway across Biscayne Bay toward Miami, proper. For once in his life, he would have welcomed being picked up by a motorcycle patrolman, but as luck would have it none turned up. He had an idea he might need help.

He was within three blocks of his apartment hotel on East Second Avenue when, patting his left shoulder in a reflex gesture of readiness, he discovered that his flat automatic was still missing from its holster.

Shayne could very easily be entering a trap unarmed. But there was no time to stop at his office for another gun as he made the turn on Southeast First Street that led to the side entrance of his hotel. He slowed down as he got close to the apartment building and cut his headlights a block away.

His first impulse was to slip upstairs to his own apartment and equip himself with one of the two Smith and Wesson Magnums he kept locked in a special cabinet of his bedroom. But sight of Chuck McGraw's big white custom built Cadillac, parked just beyond the basement parking ramp, caused him to alter this plan.

No other vehicle was visible within fifty yards of the gleaming white sports job on either side of the street. And McGraw's car was empty.

Shayne's first emotion was relief. The nightclub owner would have gone on inside and would be waiting for him, either in the lobby or upstairs. It was unlikely that the fussy, precise little gold-rimmed night clerk would have applied usual regulation precautions to a man as well known as McGraw, one well known, too, to be a friend of the detective.

Shayne halted his car on the near side of the parking ramp after driving alongside and making sure the Cadillac was empty.

He sat there with the motor idling for a moment, debating the best course of action, wondering why anyone would lure McGraw from the Blue Flamingo unless it were for some purpose not yet understood. Perhaps it was as simple

as that—simply to lure the clubowner from his place. But by rights, the redhead thought, there should be another car waiting.

Again it was just possible that McGraw had been summoned here to be snatched as Shayne had been snatched, almost two days earlier. But why pick on his own apartment hotel? As far as he could tell, nobody concerned knew his whereabouts since his departure from Larry Dawson's bungalow. And no one, not even the redhead himself, knew when he intended to return home.

His speculations were cut short by the muffled crack and echo of a shot from somewhere inside the parking garage. There was a hoarse cry and then the sound of a car door slamming and a motor being given the gun.

Shayne's whole face tightened, revealing his teeth, as he reacted to the ensuing scream of rubber on concrete by moving his car forward until the parking ramp entrance was blocked.

The big car came up the ramp in a hurry, headlights out, hard to see until it emerged swiftly from the shadows. Brakes screeched as it was brought to an abrupt halt that stalled the motor. Only the



fact that it was moving up the steep grade of the ramp enabled it to halt without T-boning Mike Shayne's car that blocked its progress.

By then, the redhead was out of his car on the street side. The only loose object in the front seat area was his key ring and, as he slid from the seat, Shayne plucked it from the steering post ignition lock. There was no time to open the rear luggage compartment and pluck out even the jack handle-tire iron.

For a moment, all was still and the redhead hefted his improvised armament. The key chain was a heavy one, given

him by Lucy Hamilton the previous Christmas, since the weight of the many keys the detective habitually carried with him was forever causing lighter keychains to break.

He felt not unlike a David facing two latter day Goliaths. His move had been instinctive rather than thought out, but he had made it and now was faced with an immediate problem of survival.

There was a brief colloquy in the car stalled at the head of the ramp. Shayne heard only the concluding words—" . . . take him and I'll take the other car."

The two men got out of their car on opposite sides and moved toward the two ends of Shayne's car cover. If he let himself get caught between them, he was cooked. So he moved toward the rear of his car, hoping to catch the man headed that way by surprise, eliminating him before the other could get in close enough to double the odds. It was Shayne's only chance.

Gripping the clump of keys tightly in the ball of his fist, the redhead crouched low as he circled the rear of his car, moving silently on his toes. He met his selected foe at the right rear corner of the car and brought up his fist from the curb, driving it into the point of

the man's jaw just under his left ear.

The goon uttered a single grunt and fell forward on his face, letting the heavy automatic he was carrying clatter loudly on the sidewalk. Shayne made a dive for it and the sudden move saved him as the other assailant fired at him through the inside of the car, sending a bullet whining past the exact spot his head had occupied a split second earlier to *splat* against the side of the building and ricochet into the surrounding darkness. There was a pause, then.

VII

MIKE SHAYNE scooped up the gun by the barrel and crowded close to the side of his car, using it as cover against a second shot while he reversed the weapon in his hand and got his finger on the trigger. But the second shot did not detonate as expected.

Shayne heard a sound on his right and discovered the cause. The man he had felled was up and driving a roundhouse punch to his jaw, thus preventing his partner from firing lest he hit his own man instead of Shayne. The redhead had time neither to aim nor to fire his weapon. All he could do was straighten up and take the

blow in the solar plexus instead of on the chin.

It doubled him up, but somehow he held onto the pistol he had retrieved from the sidewalk, and he fired from reflex action, causing the bullet to bounce off the sidewalk. He heard a hoarse shout, the beat of racing feet on the concrete, then the roar of the big white car pulling away. He could do nothing to stop them.

He was too damned sick to his stomach.

Everything he had just eaten, and everything he had drunk in the past forty or more hours, was spewed into the gutter. He was soaked with cold sweat and trembling like a leaf when at last he was able to uncoil himself. The white Cadillac was gone, of course, and its owner...?

As Shayne moved somewhat unsteadily toward the ramp, he spotted his key chain, which he had dropped after delivering the blow that had briefly felled his opponent, picked it up. The effort of bending over nearly caused him to pitch forward onto his face. But he managed and made the downramp without anything worse than discomfort.

He found McGraw propped up against the far wall of the parking garage, seated in a spreading pool of his own blood.

As he saw Shayne approaching in the dim night light, he said very quietly, "Did you get the bastards?" And, when the detective shook his head, "You will. And, Mike, for God's sake, take care of Maggi."

With that, the clubowner's eyes closed and his head fell forward. He had been shot through the body and was obviously bleeding to death.

The redhead forgot his own troubles and got busy trying to save his friend's life.

It was a close thing but, thanks to the miraculous promptness of the police ambulance and some expert emergency surgery, McGraw was still alive when they finally got him to the hospital. Whether he would long remain so was up for grabs, but at least there was a chance. The bullet had passed clean through his body, just managing to miss every vital organ.

But the brutal tragedy cost the redhead two hours and more in the toils of the Miami Detective Bureau, Homicide Division.

Chief Will Gentry, in an unusually sour humor at being routed out of bed to deal with Shayne's latest embroglio, gave the detective an unusually hard time. Although the redfaced, cigar chewing veteran head of the force had long since come to

respect the redhead's integrity, this was one of those occasions when the two were on opposite sides of the fence.

"Mike," Gentry pounded his desk with his fist and the blue vein over his right temple stood out like a mountain range on a relief map, "during the last twenty-four hours, there have been all kinds of rumors about a fix in the Superbowl, and you've been figuring in them. I want you to tell me what in hell is going on."

"Chief," said Shayne quite honestly, "I wish to hell I knew. That's why I wanted to talk to Chuck McGraw, and I'm quite certain that's why Chuck McGraw wanted to talk to me. Somebody didn't want us to get together right now. Our wires got crossed, and whoever it was got ahead of me. That's all I can tell you."

"It must be one hell of a fix to shoot a man like McGraw," mused the chief.

"It is. You can lay your odds on that."

Gentry adjusted the leather framed green blotter on his desk, said, "I don't suppose you can tell me who your client is. But I'm warning you, Mike, if you don't, I'm going to put you in protective custody."

"If you do," said the redhead, "I have a feeling we'll both be sorry."

Gentry sighed, took a deep breath, said, "Dammit, Mike, so do I. But who's your client?"

"Art Havemeyer." For once, the redhead felt no need to keep silent about his employer's identity. "I can tell you that he hired me because he's been getting the same poop you have about the game."

Chief Gentry looked stunned. He said at last, "Well, Mike, I guess it's okay this time." Shayne's quick admission had taken the wind from his sails. He added, "You have no idea who the two goons were?"

"I'd give a lot to know," said Shayne, his face hardening. "This is not my first encounter with those two gentlemen."

"And you have no idea who they are?"

"None," said the redhead. "It's been dark, all three times, and I haven't had time to put a make on either of them. Let's just say it's been busy."

Gentry's phone rang. He listened, frowning, uttered a curt, "Thanks," hung up, looked at Shayne, said, "McGraw's out of surgery."

"And...?" Shayne asked.

"He's still on the critical list. He lost one hell of a lot of blood. But the prognosis is favorable, barring complications."

"Thank God!" said Shayne.

"Do you think he's involved?"

"Indirectly," said Shayne. The fact of the night club owner's near-fatal assault made silence needless. "I'll lay odds again that he's not in on it."

"That's my feeling exactly," growled Gentry. He rubbed his broad low forehead, sighed again, said, "Okay, you might as well go." A pause, then, "And, Shayne, if you need our help, I've got a little money out—on the Dolphins."

Just then, Shayne wanted a long hot bath and a few hours of sleep even more than he wanted to refill his stomach. Besides, his gut was still sore from the blow he had received there. But it was after nine a.m. when he left Police Headquarters, and game time was drawing dangerously close and the problem was still unsolved. If the fix was in, as the redhead suspected, it was still in.

SO HE DROVE to his office, feeling seedy and irritable. Nor did the reception he received from his blue-eyed, dark-haired secretary improve his mood. Lucy Hamilton was in far from a good humor.

She said, "Michael, you look terrible. I thought we were going to have a holiday weekend. Where have you been? I've been getting calls right around the clock. All I could tell them was I'd give you

the messages when you came in."

"Sorry, Lucy." Shayne took the pile of memo slips from her desk, ruffled rapidly through them. There were, among the less important, which he discarded, calls from Chuck McGraw as of yesterday and a more recent call from the clubowner's daughter, Maggi. Also four, recent and urgent, from Art Havemeyer.

He said, "Get me Havemeyer first, will you, Angel?"

She had some little trouble reaching Havemeyer, since the Dolphin general manager was neither at the Bonanza Biltmore nor the stadium field house. As she dialed, she watched Shayne and a worried look appeared on her lovely face.

But it did not make itself evident in her voice when, putting the phone down, she said, "Mike, for heaven's sake, if we're going to the game, make yourself presentable. You look like a candidate for a hobo convention."

Rubbing the two-day stubble of his beard, Shayne headed for the tiny closet lavatory and his electric shaver. Lucy was right, of course. He did look like a bum. He got rid of the beard, washed face and hands, donned lotion and pomade and brushed his hair.

Although there was nothing he could do about bathing and changing without returning to his apartment, he looked and felt a little more presentable.

"Okay," he said. "Do I pass inspection?"

Lucy Hamilton sighed, said, "I guess it will have to do. We are going to the game, aren't we?"

"Unless you've lost the tickets. Lucy, I'll have to meet you there. I want you to sit on this phone until you get a call from Mick Finlayson. I'll keep in touch until then."

He eyed the memo slip on which Maggi McGraw's call was listed, saw that the girl had left no number for a return call, said, "Damn! Chuck asked me to take care of Maggi."

"Where will you be?" Lucy asked.

"Probably with my client. At any rate, the Dolphins' operator will have my whereabouts."

"Why Mick Finlayson?" Lucy asked. "He's in L.A., isn't he? I thought the Dolphins were playing the Steelers, not the Rams."

"Honey," said the redhead, "this is no time to be funny."

"I wasn't trying to be funny," she replied. The phone rang then and Lucy picked it up. She said, "For you, Mike."

It was Maggi McGraw. She sounded frantic as she said,

"Mike, is it true about my dad?"

"It's true," he told her grimly.

"Oh, my God!" said the girl. "I heard it over the T.V. Is... is he...?"

"They don't know yet," Shayne replied, "but the chances are good. One of your boyfriend's goons shot him. He'll probably live, no thanks to you."

"Oh, Mike!" the girl wailed. "If I thought for a minute that I was..." She let it hang.

"It's about time you started to think," Shayne told her. "Where are you?"

"At the bungalow," she replied. "I've been waiting for Larry. Mike, you don't really believe—"

"By his own admission, he's in it up to his neck," said the redhead, "and so are you." He decided that, at this time and in the place where she was, Maggi was a very poor insurance risk. He told her so bluntly.

"But what should I do?" Maggi asked.

"Get the hell to the hospital and stay there."

"But, Mike, Larry has my wheels."

Shayne said, "You've heard of taxicabs, haven't you? Have the hotel get you one and go to the hospital. You should be safe there."

"But . . ." she began, then paused. Then, very meekly, she said, "Okay, Mike."

He detected a new note in her voice, the note of fear. He said, "Don't leave any messages, especially for your boyfriend. Just get the hell over there, and don't worry too much about Chuck. The odds are in his favor."

As he hung up, Lucy said, "Weren't you a little hard on her, Michael? I mean—"

Shayne interrupted, saying, "If Maggi hadn't got involved with a fourflusher named Larry Dawson, her father wouldn't be lying in a hospital with a bullet hole in his guts. Now get me Art Havemeyer. Try the Bonanza Biltmore."

Moments later, Lucy hung up, said, "He's not there. He hasn't been there for over an hour."

"That's impossible!" said Shayne. "He told me that—"

This time it was Lucy Hamilton who interrupted with, "He left a message for you to meet him at the field house as soon as you can get there."

"He's early," said the red-head, tugging at his left earlobe, wondering what else could have happened. "Did he say why?"

Lucy shook her head. Shayne looked down at her, not seeing her, then turned on his heel



and went into the inner office. There he put away the pistol he had taken from the goon in the garage, got one of his own from the bottom desk drawer with the special lock, slid it into his shoulder holster.

It was a mate to the thirty-

eight the kidnappers had snatched two days before. With one of his own guns in its usual place, he felt fully dressed for the first time since the unseen assailants had dropped the bag over his head outside the Blue Flamingo.

He smelled big trouble ahead as he went back to the outer office.

Lucy looked worried. She said, "Michael, please take care of yourself."

"I'll try." He bent to give her a kiss, said, "See you at the game, hon."

Then Mike Shayne took off.

VIII

REACHING the field house took a bit of doing, including the friendly services of a couple of motorcycle policemen who recognized Mike Shayne and used their sirens and muscular vehicles to get his car through. Although the kickoff was still a good three hours away, every highway and byway that led to the Orange Bowl was jammed with cars and people.

The parking lots were already full, many with non-ticket holders who had driven there with picnic baskets and portable TV sets to watch the game from close enough by to savor the excitement surrounding it. Swarms of hawkers were

peddling pennants in Miami white, green and red, and Pittsburgh's yellow and black. Others offered dolls in gridiron uniform, miniature footballs with ribbons bearing the two contestants' colors, hot foods and cold drinks.

For some reason, the festivities surrounding the contest reminded the redhead of the old trumpet triple-tongue specialty, *Carnival in Venice*, even as he fretted and fumed at the slowness of his passage toward the huge stadium. He felt as if he had been caught in it for hours when he was finally able to nudge his car into the special parking area reserved for the club management and its guests.

Art Havemeyer received him alone in his office, from which other visitors had been summarily barred. Although his expression was impassive, Shayne noted that he was tight of lip and radiated an aura of tension with an undernote of fear.

Havemeyer's voice was rigidly controlled as he said, "It took you long enough to get here."

"Chuck McGraw was shot," said Shayne. "It took some time."

"I heard." The general manager dismissed the near-murder with a gesture. "I don't suppose

you heard what happened to us."

Shayne shook his head and Havemeyer nodded. "Good—then security hasn't leaked, though what good that will do us, I don't know." He paused, then said, "Mike, I can't make sense out of it. Why should they hit our Number Two quarterback?"

"Jack Fayette?" Shayne, too, was puzzled.

"He didn't wake up this morning."

Shayne said, "You mean he's dead?"

"He might as well be," said Havemeyer. "Jack looks like an old buccaneer who was weaned on iron filings, but he's the world's biggest health nut—claims nibbling cabbage leaves and nasturtium seeds and eating yogurt are what have kept him going so long. He takes more vitamin pills than the rest of the squad rolled together."

"So...?" said the detective inquisitively.

"So somebody slipped him a pill last night with enough barbiturate charge in it to knock him out for twenty-four hours. By the time his wife found he wasn't going to wake up, stomach pumps were useless—it was all through his system. They're giving him shots now, but even if they

work in time, he won't be in shape to play."

"How was it done?" Shayne asked.

"I wish I knew." Havemeyer sounded bitter. "Jack's too old a man to take bedchecks—though I wish to hell he had this time. His wife says they went to a gathering of a few old friends who live two blocks from their home. They were back before midnight. Jack turned in and that was that. Somebody must have slipped it to him at the party."

"You mean he'd take a pill from a stranger on the eve of a Superbowl game?"

Havemeyer explained patiently, "Like I said, in the first place, he's a health nut. He'll try anything, anytime, if somebody tells him it'll do him good. In the second place, he was among friends, not strangers."

A pause, then, "But why Jack? Why not Bill Bassett? I mean, why hit our backup man instead of hitting our Number One boy?"

"Perhaps they figured they couldn't reach Bassett," said Shayne, thinking about it. "Maybe they're gambling on Bassett's getting hurt."

Havemeyer snorted. "These bastards, whoever they are, aren't gamblers. They're sure thing boys. They've gotta be sure Bill is going to be hurt."

Putting Fayette out of action doesn't make sense otherwise."

Havemeyer kicked at the carpet, added, "The hell of it is, if they succeed, they'll, probably take it all. The kid we got behind Jack is two, three years away. He's still trying to forget what he learned in college so he can be a big league quarterback."

Shayne nodded. The general manager might have been voicing his own thoughts. He said, "Then, I guess it boils down to who, when and where."

"What a consolation!" Havemeyer slapped his brow with the heel of his right hand. "You got anything, Mike?"

"I'm waiting for confirmation on the California lead," said the detective.

"What about Chuck McGraw?" Havemeyer barked. "Do you think he knows anything?"

"Probably," said Shayne. "Why shoot him otherwise?"

Havemeyer pushed a desk telephone toward him, said, "See if he's in shape to talk."

"It's unlikely."

"Try him anyway, Mike. Dammit, we're up the creek if we don't get onto this in time."

Shayne called the hospital and was told the nightclub owner was still unconscious. Although progressing satisfactorily, he would be unable to

see or talk to anyone for hours. As an afterthought, the detective asked to talk to Maggi.

"Sorry, Mr. Shayne," said the nurse on the other end of the wire. "Miss McGraw's not here."

"Where is she?" the detective asked quickly.

"She hasn't been here," was the reply.

Shayne had Maggi paged, but she was not at the hospital. He hung up, dialed the Rockfort, fresh worry assailing him. Bungalow Four not only did not answer, the occupants had checked out almost an hour earlier.

"Son of a bitch!" muttered the detective as he put the phone back in its cradle.

"What's that all about?" Havemeyer asked.

Shayne told him briefly, then picked up the phone again and dialed Police Headquarters. "Will," he said as soon as Chief Gentry answered, "I want you to put out an A.P.B. on Maggi McGraw. Include the whole county."

"You think she's taking a powder?"

"I think somebody's grabbed her," said Shayne. "Look for a character named Larry Dawson—you know, the con man. He might be with her. Also the goons who attacked Chuck McGraw and me."

"That's a big order—today of all days," grumbled Gentry. "Any idea what sort of auto they'd be using?"

Shayne started to say he had no idea. Then he remembered the wounded clubowner's white Cadillac. He doubted they'd still be using it, but it was the only car he could come up with, apart from the girl's own blue Jaguar sports job, which he also offered. Gentry promised to get on it.

"You think the girl knows the score?" said Havemeyer anxiously.

"I'm sure of it. Part of it, anyway. My guess, from the way she sounded when she called me, is that's she's full of remorse and ready to talk. That's probably why she can't."

"Jesus!" Havemeyer moaned. "That's all we needed—McGraw's daughter kidnapped."

"We don't know that yet," said Shayne.

"What odds will you give on it?" the general manager asked.

Mike Shayne could only shake his head.

"Well," said Havemeyer, softening, "keep pitching—you'll come up with the answers, Mike. I only hope you make them in time." He got up, moved toward the door, said, "You might as well stick with me. I got to go and play genial host to a lot of visiting V.I.P.'s.

Maybe you'll spot something."

Shayne went along. At the moment, there was little else he could do. The V.I.P. clubhouse, high up above the fifty yard line, was full of high excitement and good cheer. Everybody present looked flushed and high in spirits at the prospect of viewing the game of the new year.

Yet, here and there, the red-head sensed the note of tension, of ultra-high-voltage nervousness, that he had sensed before in this investigation, notably at the Blue Flamingo shortly after his return from the gun trapped immobile mobile home.

He looked around for the inscrutable Harlan Marshall, failed to spot him, recalled only then that Marshall was supposedly supervising the filming of special footage of the game.

He decided it would be good policy to look over the Hollywood man's setup for the actual shooting, looked around for Art Havemeyer, who was not immediately visible in the crush. He was still looking when an attendant in Dolphin colors approached him, carrying a disconnected telephone.

"Call for you, Mr. Shayne," the youth said, plugging the phone into a handy wall jack.

"Will Gentry, Mike," said a familiar voice. "We're in luck. We just got a report on a white

Cadillac heading southwest toward the big swamp half an hour ago. The girl wasn't visible, but the driver gets a make as friend Sawson."

"How come the pickup?" Shayne asked.

"Tire jack fell out of the luggage compartment. The patrolman says the driver gave him a hell of a chase before he could catch up to return it." Gentry chuckled, added, "He had to give him a speeding citation."

IX

MIKE SHAYNE thought that over and a nasty pattern took shape in his mind. The tire iron that fell from a presumably locked luggage compartment of such an expensive car seemed too much coincidence to accept—unless someone inside the rear compartment of the vehicle had used it to pry the lid loose. If that someone were handicapped—say by being tied—as well as cramped by the confines of the compartment, the lid could very easily have slammed shut again before the imprisoned occupant could escape.

Especially, if the vehicle were going at high speed . . .

The redhead said, "So the motor cop let him go on his merry way!"

"What else?" said Gentry. "There's a lot of traffic all over Dade County to cover today. Why?"

Shayne revealed his suspicions, was rewarded by a long silence. Then the Chief said, "I suppose you think he's got Maggi McGraw locked up in there."

"It's a pretty good educated guess, Will."

Another silence, then, "Okay, just suppose you're right. Suppose Dawson had to keep the girl quiet. Where would he be taking her?"

"From where the cop stopped him," said Shayne, "it's a pretty sure bet he's headed for the same place he had me locked up."

"Okay," said Chief Gentry, "give us a fix."

Shayne did the best he could, added, "Put a chopper on it. That might speed things up."

"Okay. But why the rush? Dawson's record has never showed violence."

"There's been a lot of violence in this case," Shayne told him, "from my snatch to Chuck's shooting. This has to be a big money deal—the biggest sports fix since the Black Sox swindle in nineteen-nineteen. And with real loot at stake and the girl turning on him . . ."

Shayne let it hang. Gentry

sighed audibly over the phone, said, "Okay, you redheaded bastard. "You're right, of course. I'll send two 'copters on it. There can't be so many stainless steel mobile homes southwest of Princeton. And, Mike, as soon as I do, I'm coming out to the Bowl."

"Thanks, Will."

Shayne hung up and went looking for Havemeyer, finally ran him down in the lounge of the V.I.P. clubhouse, at the top of the stadium. The plush private glassed-in enclosure had three rows of easy chairs and lounges behind an observation window that spanned the two forty yard lines for those who wished to view the actual game in comfort. For those who preferred not to, or for whom there was no seating provision, a number of huge television screens were set in the walls of the clubhouse's several meeting rooms.

The place was packed with the wealthy, the celebrated and mere friends of the management of both teams. Shayne found Art Havemeyer at one of the several well upholstered bars, chatting amiably with a nationally syndicated sports columnist. He greeted the detective almost casually, went on with his conversation after suggesting the redhead get himself a drink, which Shayne



promptly did, ordering his usual Martell on the rocks.

Finally, Havemeyer turned to the detective, said, "Let's see what we can do about getting your secretary a seat up here in the clubhouse."

He led Shayne into a small private office in back of this particular bar, a room empty save for themselves. The mask of geniality was erased from his fleshy face, and the lines of fatigue and worry made him look years older.

"Mike, I've been in touch with some gambling people," he said, "and this thing is worse than I feared."

"So...?" said Shayne, tinkling the ice in his glass.

"So it's nationwide, and not through the usual channels. Somebody has set up a special operation in at least six of our biggest cities from L.A. to New York. Thanks to the odds in favor of Miami, the regular big operators are offering very lean pickings, both on final outcome and point spread. Naturally, the longshot boys have been laying off.

"But this bunch, whoever they are, have practically been letting the suckers write their own tickets. They've cut heavily into the big-money tote, and the regular betting syndicates don't like it one bit. They're beginning to smell a rat, too. They're hedging, even laying off bets."

"How come they didn't take action before?" Shayne asked.

"Because this particular group was not operating until three or four days ago, and it's been operating at a very high amateur level, not through professional gambling channels. Just a handful of well connected individuals, all of them with big-money contacts. Whoever organized it did the slickest job in years—and did it from right here in Miami according to my informants."

"Son of a bitch!" said Shayne. He sank into a chair and looked up at the Dolphin general manager, who was leaning

heavily on a satinwood veneered desk.

"My words exactly," said Havemeyer. "I'd give a lot to get my hands on the bastard for about five minutes."

"I'd give a lot more to know just what the fix is!" said Shayne.

"You and me both." Havemeyer sighed again, added in gloom, "Right now, I'd like to have some Pittsburgh money myself." He looked up as the redhead rose, said, "Where are you going?"

"I'm going to hunt up Harlan Marshall," said Shayne. "He's the only angle we've got left. Not that I'm betting on him. If he weren't okay, he'd never be making film of the game."

"Don't look at me," said Havemeyer. "He came in through the top, and he and that blonde are out in the next room. At least they were just before you came in. He's got three rigs set up in the bowl, plus two pairs of mobile cameras for bench and sidelines shots."

"Thanks," Shayne went out into the milling mob of super-spectators, seeking the handsome sunbronzed Hollywood producer.

It did not prove difficult, thanks to the blonde, whose brilliant golden hair stood out even in that ambience of

ultra-chic, ultra-expensive coiffures. Although the room's population was largely masculine in gender, there were more than a score of stunning women present, as well as a number of not-so-stunnings.

Marshall was a shorter man than Shayne had supposed—having only seen him seated earlier—but his head, chest and shoulders were those of a much taller person. Nor was he inconspicuous even in that brightly arrayed group, with his chrome yellow slacks, blue-and-cream plaid sports jacket and multi-hued foulard scarf in lieu of a tie.

In contrast, save for the brilliance of her hair, the blonde looked almost plainly attired in a pants-suit of black double-knit that clung to her figure like a leotard. But the figure it covered more than made up for its plainness.

"Shayne?" The producer greeted him affably. "I don't think you met Crystal last night." And, when the introduction was performed, "I heard about our host's misfortune. What's the latest on him?"

"As far as I know, he'll live," said Shayne.

"That's good news." Harlan Marshall looked quite sincerely relieved. "I haven't known Chuck long, but he seems like

one hell of a fine fellow. Damn bad luck."

Shayne nodded, said, "I wonder if I could look at one of your rigs. I've been hearing a lot about the way you're planning to shoot the game."

Marshall glanced at an expensive looking wristwatch, hesitated, then shrugged and said, "I don't see why not. Cryss and I are marking time till the game gets started. At least you can look at the setup on this side of the field. It's right under this clubhouse."

The girl decided to stay where she was, so Shayne and the producer went down alone. The booth was hung from the front edge of the upper tier of the stands, hugging the underside closely so as not to impede the view of on-the-field action of those sitting in the top rows of the lower tier. They had to descend a sharply slanted catwalk to enter it, and the booth itself was split level, with the cameras and other technical equipment at the very front, an elaborate control keyboard filling much of the space in upper level.

Somewhat to Shayne's surprise, this upper level afforded no view of the field at all, but when he voiced his surprise, Marshall indicated a battery of seven television screens that lined the rear of the lower front

ceiling directly in front of the keyboard.

"We've got a hell of a camera crew," said the producer proudly. "With only one big game today, we were able to borrow the pick of the network broadcasting units."

Marshall sat down behind the keyboard and began pushing buttons with the ease and fluency of a fine church organist pressing the multiple keyboard of his own instrument. One after another, the screens lit up, each revealing a different view of the field, three from above, four from artificial turf level.

"How can you follow the play from fixed positions?" Shayne asked.

"Who said they're fixed?" countered Marshall. He went back to his battery of buttons and switches, said, "Here's what we can do with one of them by way of example."

The center screen altered its pitch, widened and narrowed its viewing angle, zoomed in for closeups of the manufactured turf, panned the crowd and the players' bench on the opposite side of the gridiron. As he displayed the miracle, Marshall explained what he was doing.

"We're making a feature film entirely of the action on the field. With what we have here, we can cut right into the heart

of the line-play, show the action of almost every individual player on every play. This is going to be the classic documentary football movie of all time."

Shayne believed him. He said, "Where's your crew?"

"I'll have only one assistant with me—Crys—oh, yes, she's a Caltech grad, believe it or not. There will be two-man teams in the other two booths, two-man crews on the four mobile field-level cameras."

As he explained what he was doing, the detective found it next to impossible to believe that a man with sufficient talent and prestige for the assembly of such a project could be involved in a crime—much less a major swindle with criminal violence involved. Yet there was a question he had to ask.

When Harlan Marshall concluded his demonstration and flipped off the screens, Shayne said, "Mr. Marshall—"

"Call me Harlan. Everybody does."

"Harlan, there's only one thing bugging me—why in hell were you laying out so much bread on the Steelers at the Blue Flamingo last night?"

The producer actually laughed, then said, "I suppose I could tell you I'm a Pittsburgh fan, but I'm not. My heart is still with the L.A. Rams. Or

that I'm an absolute sucker, which I hope I'm not. Actually, I gamble very little as a rule."

"Then, why?"

"Okay, I put my money on the Steelers last night because I heard from a source I had to believe that there was a fix in that couldn't go wrong. If that makes me a crook, arrest me."

The producer's openness was the last thing the redhead expected. It was also an almost impervious barrier to any further questions on the part of the detective at this time. As he followed Marshall back up the catwalk, after the producer had carefully locked the steel door of the booth behind them, he glanced at his watch, saw that it was three minutes till noon.

Just before they reached the V.I.P. Clubhouse entry, the producer stopped and said drily, "Mike, I hope my bragging spiel didn't bore you to death. It seems like a hell of a lot of trouble to go through for the sake of a single question."

As he pushed through the crowded clubhouse, seeking a free telephone and/or Art Havemeyer, Shayne felt that, if he had a tail, it would be curled between his legs. His frustration and bafflement were mounting quickly. Kickoff time was crowding close, and he felt that he had accomplished

nothing. He had no real idea of where the threat to the Dolphins—a threat he fully believed was coming—would originate, or when.

Chuck McGraw lay close to death because he had wanted to see the redhead—and Shayne had proved a complete failure in protecting Maggi from her father's would-be assassins. He glanced at his watch again, saw that it was five minutes past the hour, wondered if Mick Finlayson had failed him, too. He had promised to call by noon.

A drink was thrust into his hand, a voice said, "Why so sad, Mike? This is supposed to be a jolly good time had by all."

It was Art Havemeyer wearing his geniality mask so competently that Shayne thought for a moment the general manager had received some good news. But it fell away when they returned to the small private office and he asked eagerly, "Did your Hollywood friend give you anything?" And at the redhead's negative, "I was afraid of that. So what do we do?"

"We wait." Mike Shayne was grim.

Havemeyer thumped the satinwood desk with a hamlike fist, cried, "Dammit, Mike, we're out of time!"

"Not quite," said the redhead with an optimism as false as

that his host had been wearing outside.

The desk phone rang. Havemeyer picked it up, listened, said, "He's right here," and handed Shayne the instrument.

It was Lucy Hamilton. She sounded furious, said, "Here's your damned call. I'm checking out for the game right now, and if you aren't there waiting for me . . ."

There was a click and Mick Finlayson came on. He said, "Mike, I had a little luck. I caught Dal Marcus—he's executive V.P. of General Features, Harlan Marshall's outfit—while he was on his morning jog. I just jogged a half mile with him along Beverly Glen and I'm charging you an extra bill for being pooped."

"Okay, okay," said Shayne. "What's the word?"

"Negative," said the Los Angeles man. "Marshall's clean as a whistle. Not a smear on his escutcheon but a couple of box office baddoes—and he's more than made up for those long since."

"Is that all?" said Shayne, feeling as if a final prop were yanked out from under him. "What about his personal life? Does he gamble?"

"Not enough to matter. Oh, he's got a normal domestic foulup for out here. His wife is

suing him for divorce over a broad."

"What's her name—Crystal?" the redhead asked.

"How'd you guess? Oh, he's probably got her with him in Miami."

"What about her?"

"Nothing special. Crystal Lane made a lot of low-budget Westerns in her day. The producers liked her because she did all her own stunts. Including shooting. Seems she's a modern Annie Oakley, or something. She's a tough one and it saved them money. She's too old for that now."

"She doesn't look it," said Shayne.

"Baby," said Finlayson, "the camera don't lie."

"How long have they been an item, Mick?"

"Not too long. A matter of two-three months. Marshall's wife is suing her for alienation."

Shayne hung up shortly and stared at the dead phone and tried to sort his thoughts. Havemeyer waited patiently. Finally, the detective looked up, said, "Art, I've got to get into Marshall's booth, the one right below here. It's locked and Marshall has the keys."

"Jesus!" For a moment, the general manager looked baffled. Then he said, "But not the only ones. Bowl Administration

has duplicates or passkeys to every lock in this stadium. It's a must, a fire precaution."

Marshall's hand snaked toward the phone on the desk.

X

BY THE TIME the third quarter was half ended, Mike Shayne was quite certain he had never attended a football game in such discomfort. He half-sat, half-crouched behind a stack of electronic apparatus cases he had spotted on his first visit to the booth. He had barely had time to shift two of the cases ever so slightly before Harlan Marshall and the blonde entered to get down to work before the game began. Certainly, he had had no time to make himself comfortable.

The other two had left the booth only briefly at halftime and even then he had not dared to move for fear he would be caught. His back ached and his left leg was all but asleep. At intervals, he had to resist an overwhelming impulse to sneeze.

He could see neither the real game nor its reproductions on the seven screens above Marshall's many instrument panels—for his only line of vision was toward the lower portion of the booth in which the blonde was working. Thus far,

all Shayne had learned about Crystal Lane was that she was fully as competent at her job as her lover-employer had told him.

His only contact with the contest being fought out down on the field came through the audio system. Until the very end of the first half, it seemed that his discomfort was going to go for nothing since the Dolphins, apparently demoralized by the atmosphere of sabotage in which they had approached the game, seemed to be giving it away to an inspired Steeler team.

Turnovers had kept them from any real field position during the first twenty-eight minutes of play and had helped Pittsburgh attain two touchdowns and a field goal for a total of seventeen points. And it was the Miami defense, via an intercepted pass, that had finally put them on the board with six. The point after touchdown was blocked.

The third quarter continued the Miami ill fortune as a rare Stan Czerniki fumble had led to another Steeler field goal, but then the tide had turned as Ollie Clayton ran back the ensuing kickoff for a score and the Dolphin offense had finally got going from there. Dinsmore had caught a long Bill Bassett pass to set up another and now,

with the quarterback calling his plays like a master and the green and white team executing them perfectly, they were moving toward the tying score and appeared unlikely to be headed.

A slight stir of movement from the front of the booth, a sudden small patch of daylight, made the redhead forget the fact that he was in great discomfort. Crystal had slid open a small window in front of her that apparently gave her a view of the field below. Methodically, she picked up from beside her something that looked like a bicycle pump save that the pull-handle was curved more acutely, curved as if to fit not human hands but a human shoulder.

Moving swiftly, silently, efficiently, Crystal Lane fitted a cylinder along its top and locked it into place. It was a rifle with a telescopic sight.

Shayne's hand moved toward his own handgun and he snaked it out of his shoulder holster as Crystal slipped from her seat and knelt before the embrasure, pointing the weapon through the flat rectangular opening.

At that moment, as Shayne shifted, his numb left leg betrayed him. He lurched leftward, barely caught himself in time with left hand against the

wall, but not without causing the crate that covered him on that side to bump the surface with which it was not/quite flush.

He caught a glimpse of movement and flattened himself just as the evil round eye of the disguised rifle centered on where his head had been.

There was a soft, barely audible *plop* from the silencer and, simultaneously, the thud of a high-powered bullet embedding itself in the wall behind and above him. Then came the louder crack of the redhead's own Remington and a cry from Crystal as her gun was ripped from her grasp.

Shayne had meant only to hit her weapon, thus disarming her, but his bullet angled off to enter her right shoulder, tearing a hole right through it and knocking her back against the wall, unconscious and bleeding.

"What the hell!" Harlan Marshall's voice rang out above the audio noises as Shayne scrambled after Crystal to take away her weapon and apply a tourniquet to her wound.

Marshall left his post briefly, looked at Shayne, at Crystal, then at the weapon she had assembled, then said, "I see. Take care of her till the next time-out."

The redhead decided he had never seen such dedication in

his life. It was frightening. He managed at least partially to staunch the blood flow, found a phone, called for help, which came swiftly enough. Yet Marshall remained at his post until the final gun sounded with Miami the Superbowl victors again by a score of thirty-three to twenty-three after a triumphant final quarter.

Then, when Marshall found out what had happened to Crystal, the producer-director collapsed and had to be rushed to the hospital himself. But not until he had the game in the can.

IN THE V.I.P. office, shortly before the final gun, Will Gentry, who had personally come to Shayne's rescue, said, "What in hell put you onto her?"

"Finlayson," said the detective. "When he mentioned that Crystal Lane used to star in Westerns, I remembered her from at least a dozen late-night TV shows. All black and white. When he said she did all her own stunts, I remembered the damned broad could shoot the pips out of a threespot at fifty feet—and not by film fakery." Finallyson calling her a modern Annie Oakley made that clear."

"Talk about blind hunches," Gentry muttered.

"Talk about following the only lead I had left, the only

one that made sense," said Shayne. "How's Maggi McGraw doing?"

"Fine," Gentry grinned. "That Cadillac was so easy to spot, we had no problem at all—and Dawson gave in without a battle. It would have been a different story, if Maggi had been next to him on the seat. He might have used her as a hostage. But with her in the trunk..."

A pause, then, "By the way, we picked up those two goons who snatched you when we got Dawson and the girl. My guess is, if we hadn't got there in time, they'd have killed both of them and taken off with the loot. They had bales of it in both the cars and the trailer."

"What will Crystal Lane get?" said Art Havemeyer.

"If she's lucky, five to twenty," said the Chief. "She and Dawson set it up together. What a cold-blooded team! Crystal sat by and let him get Maggi involved."

"Yeah," said the redhead, "but she was busy getting her hooks into Marshall." Shayne paused, tugged at his earlobe, added, "Now I know why I didn't recognize her. It was seeing her alive and in color for the first time that blocked me from remembering her. That and the fact that she kept so busy on the screen. When she

wasn't in action, she came across flat."

"Maybe it was a good thing you didn't," said Chief Gentry. "Maybe, if you had, you'd have been thrown further off her trail."

"Could be," said Shayne. "But she was smart enough to get a Caltech degree—and they don't come easy."

Art Havemeyer said, "It just goes to prove that brains and beauty don't necessarily make a great performer."

"They seem to have made a great criminal, though," mused Gentry. "What a female! What a female!"

"Speaking of females," said Shayne with a guilty start,

"I've got one simmering on the forty yard line down below."

"She's right in the next room, watching from the front row," said Havemeyer. "Didn't you hear me say I was going to see she got a good seat?"

Shayne said, "You're incredible." He moved into the big room, spotted the back of Lucy Hamilton's head. She sat alone on a wide lounge. He peered at the scoreboard, saw the game still had two minutes to go, headed for the lavishly laden buffet table and plucked up a thick, rare, blood-running roast beef on rye.

Mike Shayne had never tasted anything so good in his life.

In The Next Issue—Exclusively Yours—

DARTS OF DEATH

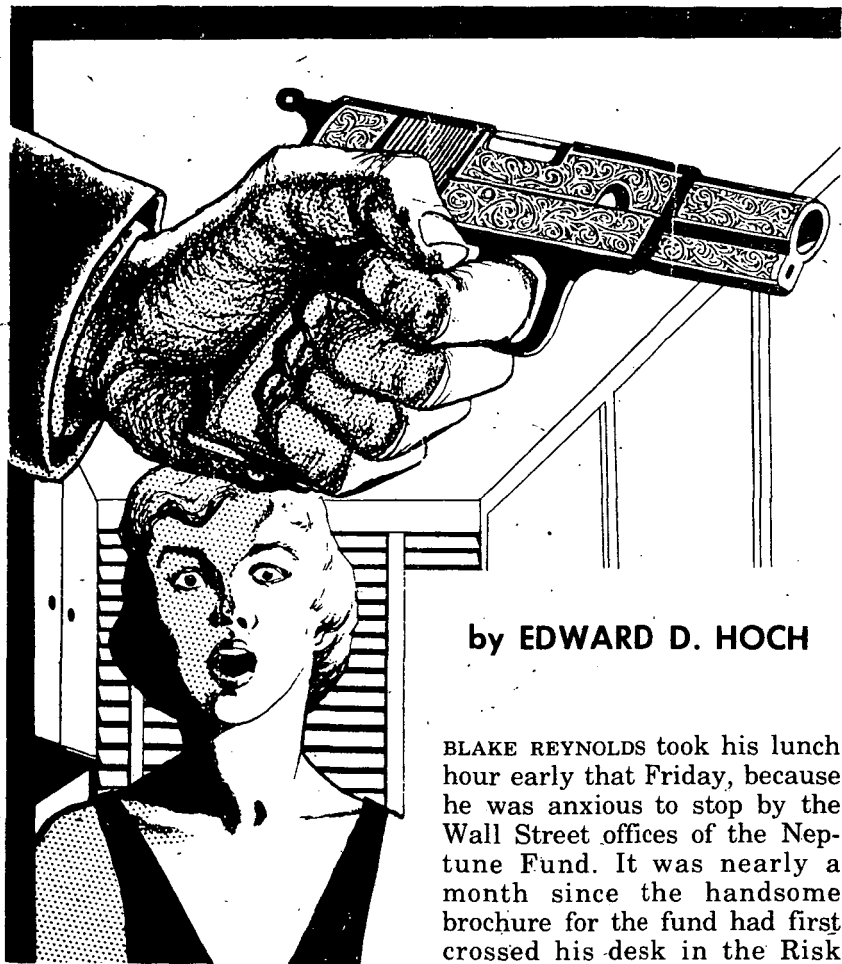
The New MIKE SHAYNE Short Novel

by **BRETT HALLIDAY**

The two men who approached Mike Shayne obviously knew a lot about him. They were prepared for any move the redhead might make. Shayne surprised them by going along peacefully... thus beginning the strangest case of the detective's career. One involving murder and a highly rated, well known Presidential contender!

The Neptune Fund

*The company sent Reynolds a brochure, and,
he was certain, were responsible for the body in his apartment.
But who had written his name on the card?*



by EDWARD D. HOCH

BLAKE REYNOLDS took his lunch hour early that Friday, because he was anxious to stop by the Wall Street offices of the Neptune Fund. It was nearly a month since the handsome brochure for the fund had first crossed his desk in the Risk

Analysis office at Pioneer Trust Company, and he'd spent an interesting half-hour reading it. Though reading such material was a prosaic part of his duties, he spent more time on the Neptune advertisement than usual.

He'd been bothered from the first by something intangible in the brochure, which included a list of investments in small and medium-sized companies that was just a bit curious. The opportunity for a personal visit to the Fund offices did not come for some weeks because of the press of other business, but now with a lunch hour free of appointments suddenly presenting itself, he was determined to learn more about the workings of the Neptune Fund.

The building he found was like so many in New York's financial district, with a shiny remodeled lobby and automatic elevators inserted into an aging shell of a structure. It was a good place for smaller firms—the mail-order houses and telephone brokers who did not need to impress customers with plush paintings and cushioned carpeting.

The Neptune Fund was on the ninth floor, and Reynolds entered the frosted-glass door to face a sweet-voiced woman in her forties who was just hanging up the telephone. "I'm Mrs. Lake. May I help you?"

she asked him, her hard gray eyes not quite so friendly.

"My name is Blake Reynolds. I do risk analysis for Pioneer Trust Company, and we received your brochure a few weeks ago."

"Oh, yes," she said with a sweet smile. "The comments have been very good on our mailing."

"I have a few questions. I was wondering if I might speak to Cyril Neptune."

"He may have gone to lunch. I'll see." She pressed down a button on the telephone and put the receiver to her ear. "There's a Mr. Reynolds here from Pioneer Trust. He has some questions about the Fund."

After a moment she waved him in, pointing to the first door. Inside the office a short bald man rose to greet him, extending a pudgy hand. "I'm Cyril Neptune. What can I do for you?"

"My job at Pioneer is risk analysis," Reynolds explained. "I investigate mutual funds and other investment opportunities and report my findings to those higher up. Your brochure intrigued me, but it left me with a number of questions."

"Always glad to answer questions."

"The firms you seem to invest in are somewhat

unusual—mostly small or medium-sized. None of them show any great growth potential."

Cyril Neptune merely smiled. "We are a new fund. We may have made some wrong guesses."

Reynolds was far from satisfied. "Are there many investments which have not been listed?"

"Oh no. The list is quite complete and authentic. There are laws, you know."

"But how do you expect to make money for your investors?"

Neptune shrugged. "No one else has questioned our policies. Certainly if Pioneer Trust has doubts, this is not the fund for them."

The man spoke with a certain mysterious charm, but somehow managed to side-step all of Blake's questions. After another ten minutes Reynolds found himself dismissed as Cyril Neptune hurried off to a luncheon appointment. He returned to the bank and worked through the afternoon, his mind continuing to dwell on the unsatisfying meeting.

That evening after work he walked across the street to a little bar where he often stopped. He'd lived a bachelor's life since a brief college marriage, and a drink after work was al-

ways preferable to the empty apartment. He'd been sitting alone at the bar for some minutes when a woman's voice asked, "Pardon me, but aren't you Blake Reynolds?"

She was blonde and quite pretty, with a wide mouth and pale blue eyes, and she spoke with a trace of a Boston accent. He smiled and answered, "I'm flattered to be so well known."

"I'm Sally Strong. I have a sister who's a teller at Pioneer Trust."

"Oh?" He couldn't remember anyone named Strong, but it didn't really matter. "Pleased to meet you. Could I buy you a drink?" If it was a pickup, he wasn't about to resist. He was a bachelor, not a monk.

She agreed readily and slipped onto the stool next to his. They chatted about the weather—rainy for June—and the banking business for the better part of a half-hour before she casually asked, "You're a banker—know any good mutual funds?"

"Please! I have enough of that all day!"

"No, seriously!"

He named a couple and casually added, "A new one is the Neptune Fund. I'm checking it out."

"Is it any good?"

"Maybe. They have an unusual portfolio of stocks."

"How do you go about checking it out?"

"Banker's secret," he replied with a grin. "Actually, the federal government does most of the work for us."

The talk drifted onto other matters, and Sally Strong declined a second drink. They parted outside the bar, with Reynolds heading uptown to his east-side apartment. It had been a pleasant interlude, but he was not a man to harbor illusions. The girl had sought him out for some reason, and that reason just might be connected with his visit to the Neptune Fund.

THE FOLLOWING DAY was Saturday, and he'd intended to sleep late. Instead, he was awakened a bit after nine by the persistent buzzing of the doorbell. He wrapped a robe about his angular body and went to answer it. An unfamiliar voice came over the lobby speaker. "Mr. Reynolds? My name is Kline. I'd like to speak with you for a few minutes. It's official business."

Reynolds hesitated a moment and then pushed the button that released the downstairs lock. Official business could mean anything, but the man hadn't sounded like a common sneak thief. A few moments later he was at the door—a tall

young man who might have been just out of college. Reynolds knew the type. He'd seen them many times before in the bank—up on the morning plane from Washington, all calm efficiency and hard alert eyes.

"What is the nature of the business?" Reynolds asked him, self-conscious in his pajamas and robe.

"I'm Sam Kline, sir." He showed his credentials. "Securities and Exchange Commission."

"An investigator."

"Yes, sir. May I sit down?"

"Certainly."

Sam Kline smiled disarmingly as he unzipped his briefcase. "It's about the Neptune Fund, sir. We understand you visited their offices yesterday."

"The word certainly gets around!"

"The SEC has an investigation going, in conjunction with other government agencies. They've been keeping track of comings and goings at the Neptune office."

"That sounds a little bit irregular," Reynolds murmured.

The young man ignored his remark and asked instead, "Could you describe your business with the Neptune Fund?"

"Their advertising brochure crossed my desk and I went down to talk with Cyril Nep-

tune about it. Part of my job at Pioneer Trust is to check on such things."

"You see, we've had some questions about them ourselves and I thought you might be able to tell us what you've learned."

"Nothing, really," Reynolds admitted. "Except that they don't seem to have a very large office staff down there."

"In addition to Neptune there's a Mrs. Lake, the receptionist, a secretary, and a junior partner named Farr."

"You already know more than I do," Reynolds told him. "I'm afraid I can't be of much help."

"If you do learn anything, we'd like to know about it immediately."

"Certainly."

"I'm not in the office much. I'll give you a number here in Manhattan where I can be reached. You're the first local bank representative who's contacted Neptune and we're interested in your reactions."

"I'll do whatever I can," Reynolds promised. They shook hands at the door and Reynolds went back to get dressed, wondering just what he was getting himself into.

HE STOPPED in the bar again on Monday night, half hoping to see the girl from Friday even-

ing, but only the regulars were in attendance. He stayed for one drink and then went home.

On Tuesday morning a letter from the Neptune Fund arrived on his desk. It acknowledged his interest and expressed the hope that Pioneer Trust might become an investor. The signature at the bottom was that of Austin Farr, the junior partner Kline had mentioned.

All right, Reynolds decided. That was his opening to ask more questions, for Kline and for himself. He telephoned the Fund office and recognized Mrs. Lake's purring voice on the other end. "Is Mr. Farr there?"

"One moment, please."

A clipped British voice came on the line:

"Farr here."

"This is Blake Reynolds at Pioneer Trust. I received your letter this morning. I still have a number of questions and I hate to bother Mr. Neptune again. Would it be possible for us to get together for lunch this week?"

A pause, and then, "I appreciate your interest, but we're really very busy at the moment. I don't know that I'd have time for lunch."

His attitude was hardly designed for friendship, but Reynolds persisted. "I wanted to ask you specifically about your Miss Strong."

"Strong? We have no Miss Strong."

"She said she was in your employ," Reynolds lied.

"Mr. Reynolds, I have another call waiting..."

"I've also spoken with Mr. Kline," Reynolds added quickly.

"You have a great many names about which I know nothing," Farr said. "I must go now. Phone me next week and we'll see about lunch." Before Reynolds could answer, he hung up.

Later that day, after banking hours, Reynolds dug out the latest weekly analysis reports on mutual fund activity. The Neptune Fund had been buying large blocks of stock lately—a few blue chips but mainly those same small and medium-sized companies, spread across the country. Bluestead Wax, Continental Flour, South States Transport. He puzzled over this for some time, then closed the books and went home. A June rain was falling and traffic was unusually heavy along Fifth Avenue.

It was Sunday evening when he saw Sally Strong again, hurrying across the street outside his apartment. She seemed surprised and a bit nervous when he called out a greeting. "Mr. Reynolds, isn't it?"

"Headed anyplace special?" he asked. "I'd like to talk some

more about the Neptune Fund, if you're still interested."

She glanced around, hesitating. "We can't talk here."

"Why not?"

"Come to my apartment later tonight. Here's the address—East Seventy-ninth. Apartment 6-B."

"Nicest invitation I've had all month. What time?"

"After nine," she said, and then she was gone.

Still wondering about it, Reynolds went up to his apartment. The lock seemed to stick a bit before the key turned, but he thought nothing of it. Inside, he stopped dead. The first thing he saw was a lamp overturned on his desk. Suspecting a burglar, he moved cautiously forward. Then he saw the body.

It was the man from Washington, Sam Kline, and he was dead—shot once through the chest. His open coat revealed an empty belt holster, but the gun was missing. Apparently he'd live long enough to pull a piece of paper and a pencil off the desk.

On it he'd printed a single word: BLAKE.

BLAKE REYNOLDS stared at the body, and at the dying message. It was certainly an attempt to frame him, and he was having none of it. He picked up the paper and folded

it carefully into his wallet. Then, as he was reaching for the telephone, he saw two police cars pull up in the street below. That could only mean someone had already reported it. Someone had watched him enter his building and then called the police. Someone was trying to frame him for the killing.

Perhaps he could talk his way out of it, but just then his impulse was to run. They needn't know he'd discovered the body at all. He went quickly out of the apartment, closing the door behind him, and took the stairs to the roof. The building connected with the next one in the block, but he knew it would take the police a few minutes to realize this. They hadn't seen him running away and had no reason to cover the exits yet.

Once on the street he hailed a passing taxi and headed across town, interested only in avoiding pursuit. He needed time to work out his next moves, to figure why Kline had been murdered in his apartment and who had done it. The Neptune Fund was obviously involved, but to what extent? And how?

As darkness settled over the city he debated the possibilities. If the police were looking for him now, the



apartments of friends would certainly be watched. He left the cab in midtown Manhattan and wandered the streets for another hour.

There seemed no place to go.

Then he remembered the address Sally Strong had given him. He hailed a cab and gave the driver the address. The drive was a short one, traffic being somewhat lighter.

Her apartment on East Seventy-ninth boasted a doorman and underground parking. Whatever her connection with

the Neptune Fund, Sally Strong lived exceedingly well. When Reynolds stepped from the elevator she was waiting for him at the door, wearing a high-necked bronze dressing gown that made him wonder immediately what was underneath.

"I was wondering if you'd come," she said, extending a hand in formal greeting.

"Just keeping our date."

She showed him into a tastefully luxurious living room with wide windows overlooking the East River. By night it was something spectacular. "Have a seat while I mix us a drink. Scotch OK?"

"Fine."

She returned in a moment with two glasses. "Where were you coming from this afternoon?"

"A movie. I could ask you the same question."

"I was visiting a friend."

"Named Sam Kline?"

"What do you know about Sam Kline?" she asked, her casual questioning tone suddenly replaced by sharpness.

"That he's dead."

"Dead!" She sat down, the color draining from her face. If it was an act, it was a good one.

"Tonight, in my apartment. Somebody shot him. I thought you might know who."

"My God—did you kill him?"

"No. But I think somebody wanted it to look like I did. As soon as I was seen entering the apartment the police were called."

"And you think I called them."

He shrugged. "You were on the scene."

"Yes, I was," she agreed. Her mind seemed far away at that moment.

"You work for the Neptune Fund, don't you? They sent you to pick me up in that bar after I seemed to be getting too curious."

"I was just looking into investment opportunities."

"Look, I'm no detective—I'm a banker. But I know you picked me up in the bar. You know Sam Kline, and you were near my apartment today when he was killed. You could only have known about me—and Kline—through some connection with Neptune."

Her expression was intense and serious. "All right, I'll tell you everything I know. I was doing some modeling about six months ago—quite successfully, too—when I met Cyril Neptune. He was just hiring people for the Fund and he offered me a job. He promised it wouldn't interfere with my modeling, and since it was an opportunity for extra income I took it. The

job consisted mainly of public relations appearances—attending functions to help publicize the Fund. As you may know, mutual funds are limited in the sort of direct advertising they can do. But pretty soon I began to notice some unusual things.”

“For instance?”

“Well, there were huge monthly phone bills to places like Las Vegas. I remember hearing Mr. Neptune questioning Austin Farr about it one day. And once when I stopped by on the lunch hour to chat with Mrs. Lake the oddest looking man came in. He looked like a gangster or something. He certainly wasn’t a banker.”

“Gangsters have money to invest too,” Reynolds reminded her.

“Sometimes I wondered just how much the Neptune Fund wanted investors.”

“They sent me a brochure.”

“Sure, but they discouraged your questions, didn’t they?”

“Did you ever discuss your suspicions with anybody?”

“I said a few things to Mrs. Lake one day. And then Sam Kline contacted me. I started reporting to him, and when I told him you’d been in the office that day he suggested I go over to the bank and follow you after work, try to strike up a conversation.”

“Interesting. If Neptune and

Farr didn’t send you after me, I wonder why Farr denied you worked there.”

“By that time they must have been suspicious of you and me both. Maybe they even knew about Sam Kline.”

“Who was Kline?”

“He told me he worked for the Securities and Exchange Commission, but I didn’t believe him. Once his coat fell open and I saw a gun on his belt. The SEC people don’t carry guns, do they?”

“No,” Reynolds agreed. “He was more likely FBI or Treasury Department. He got too close to something and they killed him.”

“Neptune and Farr?”

“Who else?” He started pacing the floor. “But they did it in my apartment, framing me for it. They wanted me out of the way, because I was asking questions about the Fund, and about you.”

“What are you going to do now?” she asked.

He glanced at his watch and saw that it was just eleven o’clock. “Let’s get the late news on TV.”

But the news report added nothing to their knowledge. Mention was made of the dead body, without identification, found in the apartment of banker Blake Reynolds. That was all. In New York these

days a murder rated nothing more.

"Tomorrow," he decided finally. "Tomorrow I go to the police and tell them everything."

"What about tonight?"

He glanced down at the couch. "Could I stay here?"

"I wish you would. You'd be some protection for me."

"Not much, I'm afraid. They'd just kill us both at one time."

"Stay anyway. I want you to. I'll call in sick tomorrow."

He stayed. He had no place else to go.

IN THE MORNING Reynolds felt better. He'd decided on a course of action, and that alone gave him confidence. Sally fixed breakfast and when he'd finished he said, "I'll be going now."

"Let me go with you."

"No. There's no need to involve yourself at this stage."

He left the apartment and was waiting for the elevator when its doors slid open to reveal a trim-looking man, with a vaguely familiar face. It took Reynolds just a few seconds to remember where he'd seen that face before—on page three of the Neptune Fund brochure. It was Austin Farr, the man with the British accent, and he was calling on Sally Strong.

Farr passed him by with only

a glance and knocked on Sally's door. When she opened it, Reynolds heard him say, "Good morning, Miss Cummings. Hope I'm not disturbing you."

Then the elevator doors closed on Reynolds and he heard no more. But as he dropped toward the ground at least one thing became clear. Austin Farr had denied that Sally Strong worked for Neptune because he knew her as Miss Cummings. Why was she using another name? Her story was that Sam Kline hadn't approached her till she was already working for Neptune.

Downstairs he checked the list of tenants. Sally Strong was listed, but so was Marge Cummings, and in the same apartment. If there were really two of them living there, it would explain how Sally was able to afford the rent on such an expensive-looking place. He was still puzzling over it when the elevator doors opened again and Austin Farr hurried out.

Reynolds made an instant decision and abandoned his plan to turn himself over to the police. Instead he left the building behind Farr, following him at a distance of some thirty feet. Whatever the Englishman was up to, Reynolds wanted to know about it. Only after he'd gone three blocks did the thought enter his mind that

Farr might have harmed Sally, but he dismissed it at once. If he still called her Miss Cummings, she still had him fooled.

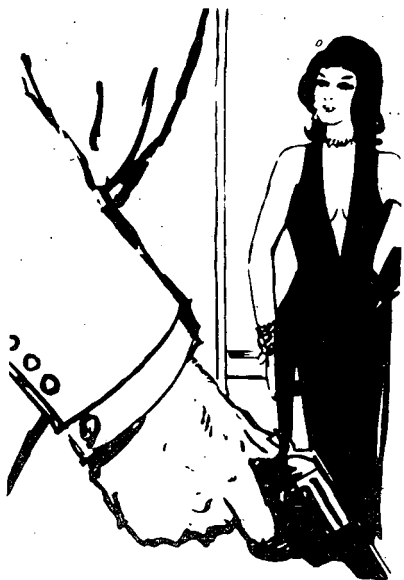
Or, Reynolds reflected, she had them both fooled.

When Farr reached Lexington Avenue he hailed a passing taxi. Reynolds caught one too and stayed behind him. As the cabs edged in and out of the morning traffic, creeping along until a sudden opening enabled them to streak ahead for a few blocks, Reynolds had time to consider his situation.

If Neptune and Farr, or one of them alone, had killed Kline, they must be ready to move on their mutual fund scheme, whatever it was. Certainly Reynolds' own arrest would bring the name of Neptune into the press, whatever else happened. And once an investigation was launched of the fund and its mysterious connections, it would be useless as a money-making venture.

The cab passed a broker's office which displayed the latest Dow-Jones changes on an electric sign. The industrial average was off 1.06 in the first hour of trading. A routine day, nothing unusual.

The cab ahead was slowing down. "This is fine," Reynolds told his driver. "Let me off back here."



"Nothing to it, buddy," the driver said. "I follow cabs all the time."

Austin Farr left his cab and rounded a corner with Reynolds close behind. Then Reynolds felt his heart sink. They were back at the Neptune office. Farr had merely been returning to work.

"Good morning! Mr. Reynolds, isn't it?"

He turned at the words, jerking his head around, and saw that sweet-voiced Mrs. Lake from the Neptune office had come up behind him. She carried a paper bag that was already showing the spreading

stains of spilled coffee. "Hello," he said somewhat lamely.

"Were you on your way to see us?"

"I..."

"Mr. Neptune is in, but I don't know whether Mr. Farr has returned yet. He went out about an hour ago."

"I think I just saw him go up."

"Oh good!"

Reynolds felt himself being swept along into the waiting elevator. There was no way to go but up. Luckily the elevator was crowded, and there was no chance for further conversation before they reached the ninth floor office of the Neptune Fund.

As they entered the reception room together, Austin Farr came out with a file folder. "Brenda, I stopped by Miss Cumming's apartment on the way in. She just has a stomach bug of some sort. She told me..."

His voice trailed off as he realized Reynolds was standing there. Perhaps in that moment he recognized him as the man he'd encountered outside Sally's apartment. "What do you want?" he asked.

Reynolds didn't really know what he wanted. He'd come there almost by accident, and from now on it was all bluff. "I

believe Cyril Neptune is expecting me."

"I'll ring him," Mrs. Lake said, reaching for the intercom. "Mr. Neptune? Blake Reynolds is here to see you."

Farr took a step forward. "Blake Reynolds? Aren't you the one the police are looking for?"

"Must be somebody else," Reynolds answered with a smile. He walked past the man into Neptune's office.

Cyril Neptune looked up from his desk and extended a hand in greeting. "Well! Good to see you again, Mr. Reynolds. I read in the papers about the tragedy at your apartment yesterday. I assume that's all cleared up?"

Reynolds nodded. "The police are working on it. Apparently the man was a thief who was killed by an accomplice—though I can't imagine what they were seeking at my place."

"Terrible thing, nonetheless." He shuffled some papers. "Now to business! Has Pioneer Trust decided to invest in Neptune?"

"Pretty much," Reynolds lied. "There are just one or two further questions. We understand there's an SEC investigation under way at the moment..."

"Purely routine. You know how those things are."

"Still... There was mention

that some of your big investors are people with connections in gambling."

"No doubt. And others are bankers and union leaders and political figures. Our fund is open to all." His smile was wide but hardly sincere.

"Some mention was made that Neptune might even be a front for..."

He never finished the sentence. The office door opened and Austin Farr entered, followed by a stocky man in a rumpled gray suit. "Reynolds?" the new arrival asked. "I'm Lieutenant Watkins from Homicide. We've been wanting to speak with you about the body found at your apartment."

Reynolds stood up. "Can't it wait?"

"Afraid it's waited too long already. If you'll accompany me downtown, we'll try not to take up too much of your time. If you'd like a lawyer present, you're free to call one, of course."

WATKINS was a businesslike man whose questions were to the point. Reynolds answered them as best he could, saying nothing about finding the body, or about the dying message with his name on it. He hadn't called a lawyer as suggested, and he hoped he wouldn't need one.

"You spent the night with a young woman?" the detective asked.

"That's right." He gave the man Sally's name and address. "That's hardly the sort of thing I'd do if I'd just committed a murder."

"I don't know. I've seen killers do stranger things than that."

Reynolds shifted on the hard chair. "Could I ask a question now?"

"Maybe. I won't promise to answer it."

"Who told you I was at the Neptune office?"

"Austin Farr called headquarters. I was nearby and they radioed my car." He smiled slightly. "That satisfy you?"

"Farr is deeply involved in this, and so is Neptune. The dead man approached me a week ago and identified himself as an investigator for the Securities and Exchange Commission. He wanted my help."

"For what?"

"As a banker I was interested in the Neptune Fund. From all I've learned I suspect it is a popular investment opportunity for certain Mafia money."

"We'll look into that," Watkins promised. "But Sam Kline wasn't SEC. He was FBI."

"I suspected something like that."

The detective sighed and stood up. "We'll check on this girl. Meantime, I'd advise you not to leave the city, Mr. Reynolds. We'll have more questions."

"I'm free to go?"

"For now."

Reynolds could hardly believe his good fortune. He was out of the building and halfway down the block before it occurred to him that he might be followed. But that was a chance he was willing to take. He stopped in a phone booth and called Sally Strong, but there was no answer. On a hunch he looked through the listings for Cummings and found a Marge Cummings at the same address, same phone number.

Were there really two of them, or did Sally's split personality extend even to dual telephones? Wondering about her, he remembered how he'd met her outside the apartment just before he found the body. Perhaps he'd trusted her too far. Perhaps she knew more than she admitted about the whole mess.

There was a uniformed policeman on duty at the door of his apartment, and he had to phone Lieutenant Watkins before allowing Reynolds inside. From his window, Reynolds saw the policeman leave and concluded that he'd been

stationed there mainly to watch for his arrival.

The apartment itself seemed reasonably neat, though there were traces of blood where Kline's body had lain on the carpet. Reynolds stared at the spot for a moment and then took the torn piece of paper from his wallet. He studied the single word once more: BLAKE. Crudely printed by a dying man—or possibly by his murderer.

But what if Sam Kline had written the word? Since Reynolds was not guilty, could it have been the beginning of a message addressed to him? But there was no message—only the name.

No message—but the killer didn't know that.

He picked up the telephone and dialed the Neptune Fund office. He asked for Cyril Neptune, and when the man came on the other end Reynolds said, "I'm free. The police couldn't hold me."

"Mr. Reynolds? Glad to hear it!"

"One thing I thought you should know—I'm back at my apartment and I found something the police overlooked. A message left by Sam Kline before he died—naming his killer."

"Why would that be of interest to me?" Neptune asked.

"You figure it out," Reynolds said and hung up.

He waited a moment and then redialed the number, asking this time for Austin Farr. When Farr came on, Reynolds said, "Sam Kline left me a message naming his killer. I thought you'd want to know."

"Reynolds? What in hell is this all about?"

But Reynolds hung up the phone. All right, he'd told them both. If either one was the killer, he was pretty certain they'd turn up. If not—if it was Sally...

He didn't want to think about that possibility.

Not quite yet.

NO ONE CAME. Seven o'clock passed, and eight o'clock, and nine. No one came.

At ten-thirty Reynolds decided it was useless. A good idea gone wrong. He tried Sally's number again but there was still no answer. He turned out the lights and decided to go to bed. There'd been little sleep on her sofa the night before, and he was feeling tired.

He'd been in bed only about ten minutes when he heard a noise at the apartment door. He froze, listening carefully. Someone was working on the lock. He ran across the carpeted floor in his bare feet, hearing the soft scratching of metal against

metal. The door opened a crack, then was stopped by the chain lock.

The would-be intruder paused, uncertain. Then the door was pulled shut. After a moment the buzzer sounded. Reynolds searched the room for a weapon, finally settling on a carving knife from the kitchen. "Just a minute," he called.

He removed the chain and started to open the door, when there was a shot and the hallway seemed full of people. Reynolds fell back, propelled by toppling bodies that he could only barely see in the dark.

Then there was Lieutenant Watkins' voice from the floor, where he'd pinned a screeching, clawing woman beneath him. "She was going to shoot you as soon as you opened the door," he gasped. "Lucky we were there! She killed Kline and you were next!"

Something drained out of Reynolds at the words. He'd hoped it wouldn't be this way.

"Get the lights, somebody," the detective shouted.

Then the lights came on and Watkins hauled his captive to her feet, and Reynolds saw the snarling, twisted face of Mrs. Lake.

SALLY APPEARED from somewhere, and came over to where he sat on the couch. "I'm sorry

we couldn't tell you more about it," she said softly. "But we had to let you go your own way and smoke the murderer out."

"What?" He could only shake his head. "I don't understand any of this. To start with, how did you and Watkins and the rest of these cops get here?"

"There was a tap on your telephone. It was an FBI tap requested by Sam after your first visit to Neptune. You see, that's one of the reasons he approached you and asked your help—to see if you'd phone someone at Neptune and report it."

"Are you FBI too?" He looked at her quizzically.

"No, I'm the one with the Securities and Exchange Commission. I took a job at Neptune under the name of my roommate—Marge Cummings. She's out of town, or you would have met her. And I was working closely with Sam Kline. You see, the whole Neptune Fund had been flooded with Mafia money, skim-offs from Las Vegas operations. Our only mistake was in suspecting Neptune and Farr of having a hand in it. Actually, it was Mrs. Lake. She was the Mafia contact at the Fund.

"They picked Neptune because of its investment in small and in certain medium-sized corporations—ones whose

stocks could be influenced by corporate events. We're not sure yet, but they might even have planned to kill a few key men, if it would drive down a stock price at a given time. Whatever their motives, Mrs. Lake was right in the middle of it."

"Did you know that all along?"

"Not at first. Not until I remembered what I'd told you last night about all the phone calls to Vegas—and how Neptune questioned Farr about it. If they were making the calls, why would they question them? Mrs. Lake and I were the only other ones in the office, and I knew I hadn't made them. Then I remembered too the man who visited the office on the lunch hour one day. I told you he looked like a gangster. Of course Neptune and Farr would be out at lunch time, but Mrs. Lake was there at the time."

"And she killed Kline?"

Sally nodded. "Sam and I came here yesterday so he could check the bug on your telephone. I waited outside for him, and that's when you met me. Sam must have surprised Mrs. Lake searching your apartment. We could see tonight how she picked the lock, and with you out yesterday the chain wouldn't have been on to

foil her. She was interested in you too, or her bosses were. I don't suppose she meant to kill Sam, but he drew his gun and they struggled over it. Maybe he was too much of a gentleman to shoot a woman."

"And tonight she was going to kill me."

Sally nodded. "The FBI phone tap picked up your calls to the Neptune office and alerted us. But of course she would have listened in, especially after you called the second time. Your message was meaningless to Neptune and Farr, but it meant something to her."

"Funny thing," Reynolds said, taking the piece of paper from a drawer. "This was the

only message Kline left—just my name. What kind of a dying message was that?"

Sally studied it for a second and then smiled. "You looked at it and you saw only your name—BLAKE. But if you were innocent it couldn't have been your name. Sam knew who killed him, and he was trying to tell us."

"I thought maybe the killer left it for the police to find, to implicate me."

She shook her head. "Why bother? The body was already in your apartment. No, you see, this doesn't say BLAKE—it says B. LAKE. Sam didn't know Brenda Lake's first name, only her initial, but he certainly knew she killed him."

COMING SOON:

DEADLY LITTLE GREEN EYES

A Dramatic Long Novelet

by **GIL BREWER**

What to do with a lovely wife, a lot of time on your hands, and a full bottle of whiskey at your side? Enjoy it all, usually. But on this fine day, murder clouded the horizon.

RESCUE OF A BLUE QUEEN

Someone was gunning for the down-and-out blue movie producer, and the one-armed bodyguard he hired soon learned that he wasn't to be the only victim!

by JERRY JACOBSON



IT WAS PAST eleven a.m. when Bruton's phone brought him out of sleep. It was sound as pleasant and dulcet to his present condition as being a moving part in a jackhammer sensitive to vibration and noise.

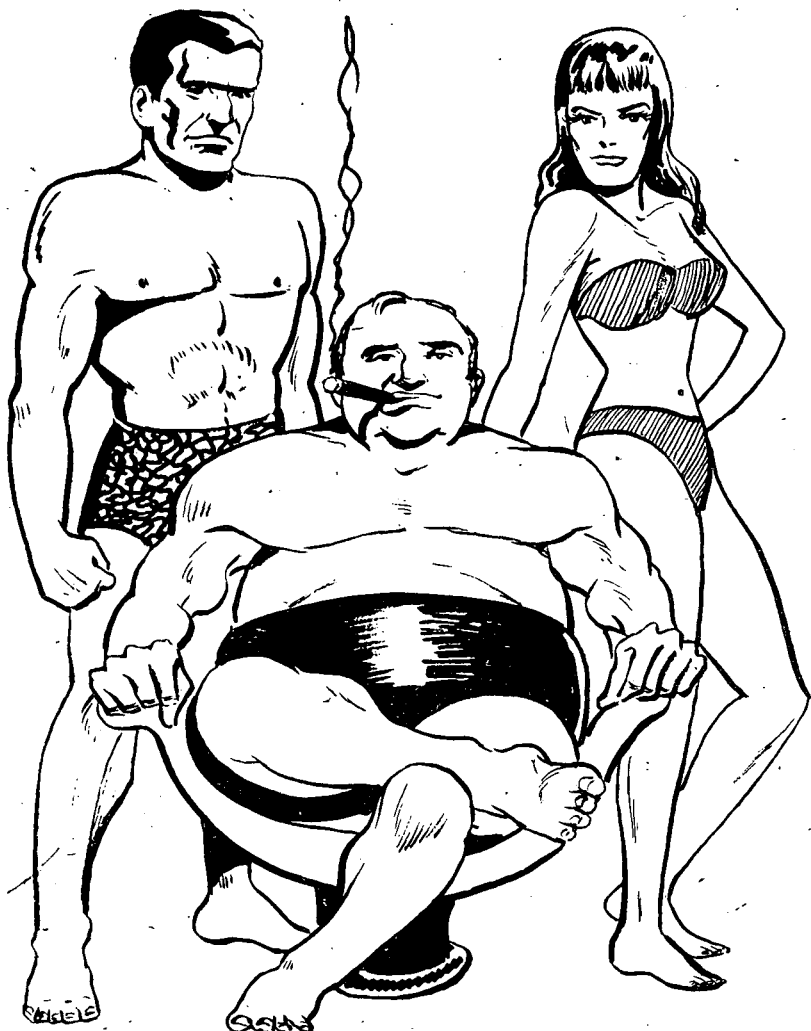
He checked for the familiar things around him and from them deduced it was all right; he was in his own bed in his tacky but cozy one-bedroom apartment at the Teakwood Lanai Apartments in South Glendale.

It took considerable ringing for him to find his telephone. It was aqua-blue and his blankets and bedspread were aqua-blue and the telephone was on the

blankets and the bedspread. But he found it.

Bruton wasn't much enchanted with the rough voice in his ear. It was the manner of voice which said it knew considerable about such socially unacceptable things as cement for jackets and long rides at night and sneaky eight mm. pistols stuffed inside sock garters. Bruton had not been in the private detective business long enough to know many such people but he had amply alert radar about them whenever one happened to cross his path or ear.

"Mr. Bruton? Buzhart Bruton, the private detective listed



in the Los Angeles' telephone directory?"

"You aren't a present client," said Bruton. "No, I don't recognize your voice. If this is the

guy with whom I exchanged the time of day and other matters in an apartment parking lot in South San Gabriel this morning..."

A boyfriend of a married woman had discovered Bruton and had taken unfair advantage of him. Bruton had been hired to follow the woman by the husband. He took on a lot of those kinds of cases because they paid reasonably well and if you kept your cards together in a full deck, you rarely got hurt.

Bruton was missing a left arm and that was why he was invariably knocked to Cleveland in fights were all other things were equal. He'd lost the arm in Vietnam. A mortar round took it and ran away. He'd tied off the veins-himself before he had a chance to bleed to death. He'd been a corporal but he wasn't that stupid.

The voice was perplexed about the apartment parking lot in South San Gabriel.

"No, no, Mr. Bruton, we've never met and I am not presently a client of yours."

"My mother lives in San Gabriel," Bruton said, suspiciously. "You wouldn't be doing anything as disgusting as checking up on me for her, would you?"

"Mr. Bruton, I don't even know your mother."

Bruton found a cigaret on the nightstand. He smoked excessively. He often felt the Surgeon General's campaign against smoking would be

going better if Buzhart Bruton's face were put on cigaret packages instead of the printed warning. Some days he looked and felt terrible.

"Mr. Bruton," said the insistent voice, "I'm inquiring about your present availability."

"You want to be pencilled in," said Bruton.

"Inked in, Mr. Bruton. Are you available for full-time work?"

He'd been batted around very good in the parking lot by the married woman's boyfriend but he still had plenty of his wits about him. "Let me check my book a second."

Bruton was indifferent about it. Life was eighty per cent illusion anyway. He was simply painting another picture into it. In truth, he had no book and he had no regular office, but he had a facile imagination which would do until the real things came along.

Was he available? Indeed he was. He was currently juggling six cases a seagull on relief wouldn't pick over. Three divorce surveillances (maybe just two now), and one business surveillance.

He let a reasonable interval pass away from the phone. You had to play them like a foxy trout if you were wise. Bruton knew he was preceded in the directory alphabetically by only

AAA Detective Agency and Armbruster Investigations and likely both of them had turned thumbs down on this guy. But it never hurt playing hard to get.

"I don't see any way I can clear up what I have until maybe Monday morning at the outside," Bruton told the caller. Aloofness wouldn't hurt. He was well-regarded, after all, and he had some fairly good contacts down at L.A.P.D. and his card and gun had never been shelved.

Besides, the voice was beginning to register itself on him as creepy. A creep. Phylum *Reptilia*. Lots of gold rings on his fingers and a pot belly and plenty of sweat and plenty of lusting after young unspoiled girls one third his age, which Bruton guessed at around forty-five.

But the caller didn't seem to mind Monday at all. "Today is Saturday and I'm having some friends over for the weekend. Our business might get in the way and none of my guests are the kind I would worry over, in the sense of loyalty. Besides, this will give you the weekend to make your discreet little inquiries about me."

"Always helps to have background on the client."

"Precisely as I would have our relationship develop, Mr.

Bruton. A close relationship. The closer, the better."

Buzz Bruton swallowed. "You want a bodyguard?"

"You do handle that sort of work, do you not?"

"As long as the guardee does not keep me from seeing in all directions."

"Be assured, Mr. Bruton, you shall be appraised of my complete situation. Shall we say eight a.m., Monday then?"

"Let's say." Bruton got his ball-point from inside the headboard. "Let me get my pen from my desk drawer and I'll take your name and address. Okee-dokes. Go ahead."

"My name is Victor Grasso and my address is 12265 Poinsettia Road, in The Foothills. Do you know it?"

It was fringie Beverly Hills. Money, and lots of it —strangely and marginally got. Even criminally got. It was a high-surveillance, and high-undercover area for L.A.P.D. Vice, Embezzlement and Fraud divisions.

"Find my way out there all right, Mr. Grasso," Bruton said.

"You've...heard of me, Mr. Bruton?"

"No, sir. But then I don't get around too much. There's my mother, you see."

"Yes. Mothers can be both a joy and a bane on our existances at times. We must dis-

cuss that sometime. Monday morning, then, Mr. Bruton."

The man likely had better things to do. Like throw a meaty bone to his vulture."

THE SHADY SIDE of the avenue appeared to have been Victor Grasso's habitual route going back ten years. Los Angeles did not hunger to put him in striped clothing currently. But according to Hal Demion in Investigations Division, Los Angeles Police Department had him on their Christmas list.

"Grasso worked a telephone fraud back in the early sixties," Demion told Bruton over the phone. "You call your mother this week by the way? She calls here you know."

"I called her Tuesday, Hal. Tuesday. And Wednesday I moved a concrete bird bath for her. Thirty feet I moved it. Me, a handicapped vet. I called her Thursday to tell her I was suing for physical damages. Now tell me about Grasso and leave my mother to worry over how injured I may possibly be."

"Okay, okay. The telephone fraud was off the coast of Maine. One of those islands where the rich summer people go to play and sort stock certificates. Anyway, Grasso set up a telephone company out there on this island. He linked up with the major national

telephone companies. He had about five hundred subscribers and eventually grossed over \$400,000 the first two years. Gross, net—it's the same animal. He didn't pay any taxes."

"Shame on him."

"Turned out Grasso inflated the number of calls connecting up with the big companies," said Demion. "Everybody's hustle turned out all right. The telephone companies got enough revenue not to become suspicious and Grasso pocketed as much as he thought he could get away with. It took a federal commission to finally unsnarl all the wiring Grasso had laid. But when they did, Grasso was obliged to check into a federal hotel for two years."

"What line of work did Grasso choose after his rehabilitation?" Bruton asked.

"Nothing you'd care to write home about. Bank embezzlement, no conviction. Dime-a-day life insurance hustle, again no conviction."

"Dissolve to Los Angeles," said Bruton.

"Six years ago. He arrived with a carload of other people's money which nobody could get back legally and immediately proceeded to sink it into the sleazy motion picture business. He is now a mogul producer of the blue movies. He leased

1500-square feet of warehouse up the Pacific Coast Highway, set up and equipped photo labs and bought himself six pair of kinky sunglasses and a canvas director's chair."

For a simple, uncomplicated case of bodyguarding, this was becoming a little too wrinkley for Bruton's liking. Not only did he know nothing at all about blue movies, he had an inherent distrust for anyone connected with them. He had never been that blue. But then again, it certainly wouldn't hurt to learn as much about Victor Grasso as he could.

"About the movies," he said to Demion. "Red ink or black?"

"Enough black to paint a thousand miles of blacktop," said Demion, derisively. "Never put his name on film or a check. Set up a dummy corporation for funding and bill-paying, made a film a month for three years, national distribution, sixteen mm for the big screens, eight mm masters with as many as 2,000 prints for staggies at twenty-five dollars for black-and-white and sixty dollars for zippy color.

"We wanted to nail him like Dillinger, but the Supreme Court fancy-stepped around everything on their X-rated docket and finally ruled men like Grasso could ply their art lily-white, free-and-clear so



long as the product and the producer didn't sell to juveniles, didn't force the product on an unwilling public and refrained from pandering."

"Which meant business as usual," said Bruton.

"Ah, until earlier this year when the Supreme Court finally felt the discomfort of fence pickets under their robes and took a leap toward com-

munity standards and shut guys like Grasso off like water taps. In effect, the courts were pushing the blue flicks back to a half-block area downtown in a handful of liberated cities.

"But the word was out in thousands of Grasso's previously untouchable outlets. That is, 'Police investigators will inspect establishments offering allegedly obscene material to the public and upon discovering such material, as defined by community standards, will confiscate the offending matter and present criminal cases to city and/or county prosecuting agencies for appropriate legal action'."

"I've noticed how some of the bluer efforts are overstaying their popularity around town," Bruton said.

"Grasso and producers like him are caught in the bind of law," said Demion. "We see him, he sees us. He's running all his old films until they fall apart in shreds in the projectors. And we're lurking around the corner and in the bushes waiting for one new print of one new flick. Figure it out, Bruton. Grasso makes 2,000 stag prints which cost him four dollars apiece, sends them into the distribution network and whammo, we come down like a black Monday on all 2,000 and Grasso is out \$8,000. To say

nothing of the fifty grand loss from sales."

"So the lights are out in the lab these days. What about the production warehouse?"

"There's no doubt the cameras are still turning there," Lieutenant Demion told Bruton, "but only a couple days a week and very, very slowly. No law against *making* them, after all."

There was a pause.

"I don't wonder Grasso is in the market for a bodyguard," Demion said finally. "With a nice little empire operating at deadstop for the past years, a lot of investors, angels and dewy-eyed starlets are beginning to feel the pinch, if you'll excuse the pun. Particularly the first two."

"The girls are forced into the Guild, get union scale and rarely work more than twice in a film. But the money boys, when school's out for them, the school burns down behind them. The point is, Bruton, I wouldn't become too zealous about guarding Victor Grasso's well-fed, chubby little body. You just might find revenge and retribution coming from too many directions to be healthy."

"Lieutenant Demion," said Bruton, "For a guy who's got a drawerful of restraining orders and injunctions with my name

already printed on them, you make me feel almost loved."

"You are a public headache to me more than I care to admit, it's true," said Demion. "But I've also come to realize that chasing you all over L.A. and scraping you off walls and picking you up in crumpled heaps lends a refreshing dimension to my job that I'd genuinely miss if it were taken from me. You're a hustler secretly looking for a big score, in other words. But that doesn't prevent a jerk like me from having a soft spot in my heart for you."

"I'll drink my milk and be in bed by ten, Lieutenant and that's a promise."

"I know what you drink, Bruton and I know what time you get to bed and with whom. Just don't get yourself murdered for a creep like Victor Grasso."

IT WAS the sort of Monday morning which came all too infrequently to Los Angeles, the kind of day when you like to eat an orange in front of the whole world, the kind of day Mama Cass sits down and writes a tune about L.A. with inspired genius causing John Denver to run out and put his arms around a mountain.

But slowly, the higher Bruton climbed his old Mercedes into the low foothills, the more

dismal the day became. He knew why. The closer he drew to Victor Grasso, the farther behind him was placed the golden dawn he had wakened to.

Poinsettia Road wasn't flowering with a single one of those flaming scarlet plants for which it was named. But then Los Angeles had a flare for naming its streets for 'Darling!' value and not for any relationship to reality. Orange Grove Boulevard didn't show a single orange tree for its name, Los Robles was barren of oak trees, Roca Street ran so far inland it died before it came upon a cliff, and Lake Avenue was a stretch of pavement.

Poinsettia Road dipped and swerved its Poinsettia-barren way. Willows began swallowing Bruton up and here and there the roofs and eaves of houses peaked out from behind high hedges and thick foliage. The close-to-being-very-rich also liked distance between themselves and their neighbors. And height above the common world in the smog-choked, shoulder-to-shoulder clutter in the valleys below.

Bruton spotted 12265 Poinsettia Road and plunged left across the roadway and between a narrow gap in head-high hedges. Thirty feet later he nearly ran into an iron gate. He got out of his car and depres-

sed a white button set in a red brick wall. There was an electronic crackling sound and then a male voice was asking Bruton his identity.

"Buzz Bruton to see Victor Grasso."

The voice giggled perversely. "Buzz? What are you, a piece of carpentry equipment?"

"It's short for Buzhart."

"Buzhart, eh? Dynamite. Just a minute and I'll see if the gate goes for it and cramps up laughing."

Bruton got back in his car, seething. He would remember the voice for later.

There was another length of winding drive and then a cul-de-sac wrapping around the front of a piece of Spanish wedding cake. Three cars clogged the front door, all spanking, showroom-new. The cramped but elegant Fiat 128 was a dead giveaway for a woman's toy. It was a toss-up between a Maserat-Ghibli and a Jaguar 2-plus-2 as to which was the transportation of Victor Grasso, though Bruton wasn't ruling out the possibility of one for each leg.

No one was breaking a neck to greet him. Bruton walked under a shelf of greenery and onto a slate porch, upon which he half expected to see obscene words scribbled in chalk. The front door was open to cut the

heat of the day, which was already surging through the eighties like a hot knife through butter. The expansive, expensive living room was heavy and rude Spanish. Iron and wood. It was empty. Bruton lit a cigaret and looked around for a charging bull or a woman with a rose in her teeth.

The dining room was more El Cid Spanish but everyone was still out on a fire-drill. Bruton had no idea where the kitchen was, but then he wasn't hungry. The dining room had all six glass doors thrown open wide. There was a pool and beyond it a bit of rolling grass trying to become open country, but claustrophobically too close to cliffs dropping into the city to be anything but a fair-sized place to stretch in.

His eyes swept left, toward the pool, which ran farther south along the slender patch of landscape than he'd first thought. The pool before the Taj Mahal wasn't a wholly inaccurate image to have pop into mind at the sight of it. And there were people.

A girl lay draped on a chaise next to a glass table piled with magazines, drink glasses, lotions, fruit, and three kinds of sunglasses. Beyond her, down at the distant end, three men in bathing suits lolled at a circular table. Nearby, an olive

skinned waiter looked perfectly comfortable in a starched white jacket and black tie. And then again, to Bruton's way of thinking, he could as easily be a bronze statue for hanging towels to dry, for all the movement he was making.

Before his voice boomed down the narrow green corridor, Bruton already had Victor Grasso picked out: the squat, pudgy one in the middle toward whom the two others leaned obediently, the one with the fat, black cigar and the gold robe draped on the wings of his chair.

"Hey, Bruton! Come on down and join us before a bullet comes seering out of the trees!" he laughed.

Bruton grimaced and made his way to the right, thinking that if a bullet did come seering forth suddenly toward Grasso's beachball body, he wasn't going to break any muscles or sprint records throwing himself in its path. He passed the girl. He saw the slender body stir as the eyes came up above the moonish, over-sized sunglasses of the moment. She didn't look twenty, Bruton was terrible at guessing the ages of women. They had too many ways to hide it or increase it.

"The private detective," the squeaky, honey-bear voice said. "Buzz-z-z. Like the buzz-z-z

saw. Chew them up and spit them out. And only one arm. This must be the week to hire the handicapped."

"Your sandwich is molding," Bruton said, smiled and continued on past her, hardly breaking stride, though his eyes had stayed quite a while longer.

NOBODY GOT up from the table at the far end of the pool. Bruton felt like the guy who came to read the water meter. The two men flanking Grasso were grinning like ex-boxers waiting for a bell to ring just once more. Bruton grinned back, waiting for either to speak so he could break open a jaw and put one up on his side of the ledger.

Grasso's handshake was something of a disappointment. Bruton felt he'd caught a fish he didn't know what to do with.

"Sit down, Bruton, please," said the same, oily voice he'd made mark of on the telephone. "On my right is Bruno," said Grasso of the youngish dark-haired man making a contest of showing how perfect and dazzling and dangerous were his rows of white teeth. "And this gentleman is Moody, who once fought for the Middleweight World Championship at the Olympic against someone equally forgettable."

"It wasn't for the championship, Mr. Grasso," corrected the voice Bruton instantly recognized as the one which had let him into the compound. "It was an elimination to see who fought the champion. It was fixed for the other jerk, because he was a college jerk and they wanted to elevate boxing. The champ dumped him in two, so they didn't elevate nothing as far as I'm concerned."

"Moody, you talk too much," said Grasso.

But Moody was too busy grinning at Bruton. "The eye's first name is Buzhart, Mr. Grasso. Buzz-z-z, like a piece of carpentry equipment. Or a little bee stinging around you until it upsets you and you squash it between a couple of fingers."

Grasso shot Moody a look of complete exasperation. "Moody, go rub some oil on Bambi. And Bruno, go to the house and play some pool."

The bronzed, bathing-suited bookends dispensed, Grasso had the Oriental houseboy serve Bruton some coffee and then dispatched him to the house as well. It was easy for Bruton to see the total amount of trust Grasso had in his lightweight entourage would fit nicely into the corner of an eye with no irritation whatever.

Grasso was taking up a cool

grin now. "I expect I've been checked out, Bruton. Since I was a complete unknown to you before."

"I learned some statistics, yes."

"The more sullied ones."

"Telephone fraud, bank embezzlement, insurance policy business. And now the blue movies."

"Which are completely legitimate according to community standards, Bruton. Have you seen any of my movies?"

"I've been found that far downtown once or twice," Bruton said, taking a sip of coffee, "but not that blue."

"Ah, yes, the lonely people," affected Brasso, his frosted drink glass against the fattish lips in mock concern. "Who among us, from time to time, has not been lonely? But to the chronic lonely falls the greatest crushing burden of all it seems to me."

"I've never thought too much about it," Bruton said, forcing a civil smile and leaving his comments at that.

"Actually, Bruton, there are many who think we do mankind a great service. How many among us, after all, can afford the luxury of a private psychiatrist? Or the expense of a costly woman as a regular evening companion as a pur-

chased commodity? Of course, we all await the day when the neighborhood, low-cost psychiatric clinic is as accessible as the corner bar. But until that help arrives for the distressed, lonely millions, the blue film will provide the stop-gap relief."

Bruton wasn't going to do battle with his new employer over such subjects as recidivism and emotional stagnation and prurient influences. But he wasn't going to climb up on any bandwagons for him either. What he wanted was an explanation of why Grasso felt he was so eminently abusable, from which directions he suspected abuse might be coming and what he was willing to pay Bruton to deflect it away from his corpulent, easily hitable body.

"That Supreme Court ruling was like somebody flinging a monkey wrench from Washington D.C. to Los Angeles and landing smack in my machinery on the fly," Grasso said woefully. "I got my production studios up the Pacific Coast Highway that's now just a crummy warehouse for motion picture equipment. I had to let people go. Sound technicians, mixers, photographic people, grips, wardrobe people, artists, directors, actresses. The Supreme Court may have been the



ones who threw sixty people out of work, but I was the one who handed them their pink slips."

"It would help," Bruton said, "to know just which pink-slippers you think are going to be coming across the line at us."

"I have assembled a file of photographs of all those I suspect might cause trouble, plus their addresses and telephone numbers, plus some notations on those whose complaints against me could develop into physical dissent. Plus \$2,500 as your initial retainer fee. I hope you don't mind cash. It's all in large bills. Easier to carry."

Bruton was about to object about that amount being a little unrealistic, not to mention excessive. But then he viewed

it in the context of taking bad money out of circulation and decided to accept the fee graciously.

"Come on up to the house, Bruton and I'll turn my file over to you and count out your money."

Bruton rose and followed Victor Grasso's fat swaying form down the tile walkway collar-ing the pool. Actually, he wasn't all that bad a sort for the seedy, shoddy enterprises he was in. But then again, what did Bruton know? He knew almost nothing about people like Victor Grasso and the girl and Grasso's two card-board male cut-outs from *Sun-Worshipper Magazine*.

He looked across to the opposite side of the pool. Muscle Man Moody was into good rhythm with the oil on the girl's back, occasionally sneaking a nip of a kiss whenever he thought Grasso's head was turned the other way. And it struck him that either Bruno or Moody might be capable of far greater indiscretions when Victor Grasso's eyes and back were turned.

When the sudden rifle burst came, it tore through the hill-side like a peel of summer thunder, and chips of apron tile flew into the air at Victor Grasso's feet and then a second rifle round scudded into the

emerald waters of the pool. A feather of water exploded in the air, followed by another. It struck Bruton that someone was either a very bad shot or an exceptionally good one.

"Everyone into the pool!" screamed Victor Grasso, whose butterball bouncing body was already lumbering for watery safety. Between him, Moody and the girl, it was nearly a dead heat. Bruton sprinted in a low profile for the protective cover of high green hedges to his right. Two more shots rang out, both tearing into the pool. Grasso's intended assassin had lost track and sight of Bruton.

Against the hedge Bruton snapped out the .45 holstered over his heart. He shot a glance toward the pool. Three forms were swimming for the near side and cover against the pool's wall. Bruton wondered where Bruno was.

Bruton made a hole through the hedge and saw thick forest running all the way back to the roadway that was Poinsettia Road. The angle of the bullets cutting diagonally into pool water told Bruton the rifleman must be in a tree and waiting to spot Bruton's bulky form below where a rifle could tear up anything in its path to get to its target, but where a .38 pistol would kill nothing but limbs, branches and leaves.

Bruton dropped to his stomach and listened. Pine needles ran into his nostrils as he inhaled heavily after his run. Then he heard a rustling out beyond him, perhaps forty or fifty yards. Then quick footsteps retreating. Bruton jumped to his feet and began moving up, tree trunk to tree trunk, moving only when the other man moved, but not making up any ground.

Five minutes later, Bruton came to the eight-foot chainlink fence. He put a palm to it. It wasn't vibrating so much as a whisper, and the footsteps were gone.

Backtracking fifteen years he found the sniper's roost. On the ground at its trunk lay two fresh branches snapped off at his descent. He looked for shell casings, but the sniper appeared to be a meticulous housekeeper. The footprints, in the heavy bed of pine needles, were too indistinct and smudged to be useful.

"Well?" was the simple inquiry from Victor Grasso when Bruton plodded his way back to the pool. It struck Bruton just a bit funny that they should all be up and out of the pool except for the girl. Perhaps Grasso had heard Bruton's chase through the trees. He'd made enough noise at it.

"He slipped away clean," said

Bruton, "but he didn't go over the fence."

Moody tried to make a face of ridicule, but it turned itself out to be comic pout. "Didn't go over the fence? Now just what is that suppose to mean, Mr. Bruton?"

"It means he didn't go over the fence."

Bambi Fawne intruded her shaky little voice into the conversation. "Vic honey? Is it okay to come out?"

"Yes, yes, yes. Come out, come out! What am I, a lifeguard."

Bruton looked down the length of pool. Bruno was moving up from the house. He had a pistol in his hand, but he seemed a little reluctant to pop out from behind the protective L of hedge near the flight of steps leading up to the pool area.

"Look at him," said Victor Grasso, in disgust. "The good money I pay him to show up late and lurk behind hedges. Bruno! Get out front and see if you can spot a car or some jerk running with a rifle!"

Bruno nodded dumbly, turned on his heels and disappeared.

"Now, Bruton," Victor Grasso said, turning to him. "You believe me now when I tell you that I know someone is out to kill me?"

"I believe someone is terribly angry with someone," Bruton told him.

"Listen, Bruton, to entertain such an idiotic idea would be to entertain the notion that Bambi Fawne could act her way out of a grocery sack."

Victor Grasso's Oriental manservant was idly setting up the luncheon table in the near distant dining room, his ears obviously alert to pick up any conversation straying from the living room. Bruton waited until he'd gone back to the kitchen before he answered Grasso.

"Mr. Grasso, you wouldn't know a fact if it came up and sat down on the bridge of your nose, and left a calling card. Where was Bruno when the shooting broke out?"

The preposterous expression was beginning to turn slowly to indulgence on the fatty cherubic face. "Go on, Bruton. I'm willing to be convinced."

"For a second thing, I checked the entire perimeter of the fencing along the eastside of your property. I found no ground matted down anywhere, which means no one went over your fence at any point."

"Simply explained," said Grasso. "The sniper merely moved along the fence until he came to the front drive where his car was parked."

"The sniper had no car, Mr. Grasso. And someone who didn't live or work here couldn't have been that sure of the geography."

Grasso made himself a drink from a Spanish side table. He lifted it to his lips slowly as Bruton watched him from the living room. "The rifle," he said to Bruton at last.

"Somewhere in the house. Or on the grounds. Buried or stored. A 30-30 carbine with a tapered barrel."

"And you think the man behind it was Bruno."

"You're paying me to protect you," said Bruton. "And part of that large batch of big bills you just gave me goes for making an honest attempt to point out your antagonist."

"But Bruno hasn't a reason in the world to want me dead," Grasso said, disagreeably enough to send shivers through his drink as it shook in his meaty hand. "He's a first-class banana-head and he knows it. A gopher, a pool-cleaner, a muscle-man. Without the hefty check he gets from me every week, he'd be another number on a welfare form."

"True, a man doesn't kill his golden-egg-laying gander unless he's found himself another source of eggs."

"Which means, Bruton?"

"Which means I shouldn't

disregard the possibility that Bruno's head has been turned from other directions."

"Hired by someone?"

"A backer, a promoter, a producer," said Bruton. And then, with a wry wink he added, "Maybe even by some independently wealthy Pasadena librarian who doesn't like the idea of blue movies."

AFTER LUNCH, Bruton took a casual tour of the house and grounds but the rifle didn't turn up. By now, it likely was disassembled and put back in its secret place until Bruton backed off the trail and the time and opportunity turned ripe once more. Bruton didn't like admitting it, but Grasso was as good as a dead man. He was a big, fat juicy target waiting around to be hit.

Bruton did the only thing he could: He told Grasso that his safety might very well depend upon Bruno's being in another, more distant locale, preferably someplace where he could be kept an eye on. After considerable coaxing, Grasso said he would dispatch Bruno to the production studios up the Pacific Coast Highway to do a little painting and rust-scraping.

Bruton suggested he also assign someone he could trust to make sure Bruno didn't stray

far from his paint can or scraper.

"This should be the end of it, then," Grasso told Bruton after Bruno drove off under a murky, killer's look an hour later.

"Let's say we're cutting into the odds against you," Bruton said, wondering how much those odds had really been diminished.

A few minutes later, Bruton wandered up to the pool area. Bambi Fawne, fed and contented, was sprawled again in a chaise, now on the pool's east side to catch the rays of the haze-shrouded Los Angeles sun as it began its fuzzy decline down the western sky.

Bruton's quiet fall into the adjacent chaise didn't go unheard or unnoticed.

"Buzz-z-z," said the purposely teasing voice. "Chew them up and spit them out."

The pushiness didn't wear well at all on the lithe, pixy frame; but Bruton reminded himself that in Los Angeles sex was a very pushy business, simply because every drugstore Lana Turner and cheer-leader beauty queen came here looking for klieg lights meant just for her to bathe in.

That was the trip Bambi Fawne had purchased with tough, taut plastic sensuality. As she lay soaking up lux-

uriant L.A. sun, Bruton couldn't escape the vision of a young woman dying.

"How'd you lose your arm?" Bambi asked.

"I was in the war," Bruton told her. "Our side. It's not a pretty story. We were having chow in the field and I raised my hand to signal for seconds on creamed chipped beef on toast."

Bambi Fawne shot him a twisted look.

"My turn to ask a question," said Bruton. "Who ever gave you your name?"

"An agency guy. He told me I should have a soft but feline animal name. He started scribbling down names until he got to Bambi Fawne. Five and five. It looks good on a mar-quee."

"What does the name on your birth certificate say?"

"Dorthea Crabtree. I mean, you just *know* that has to go right away."

"Where was home?" Bruton asked.

"Black Mountain, Pennsylvania. Which is near Steelton. Which is near Harrisburg. When I play a song you recognize, Mr. Private Eye, let me know."

"Coal mines and steel rolling mills and the high school football game on Saturday night," said Bruton.

"And good old Black Mountain High," said Bambi Fawne, making no attempt to hide the self-deprecation. Nor the deprecation she felt for a jerky, coal town being eaten alive by the jaws of bulldozers and the jackhammers of miners.

"Wow," she went on, still in good humor, "if you ever want the directions to Nowhere, U.S.A., I got the map right here inside my brain. I haven't been back since I left four years ago. And I haven't thought about it, either."

"Why did you come out to the West Coast, when you were a few strides from New York?"

"Space, man," was the simple reply. "There's no room in New York City. I mean, no matter where you hang your clothes and put out your shingle, people are going to have the hustle out. But the hustle is spread a little thinner in L.A., know what I mean?"

"Malibou and North Beach and the L.A. Freeway and all of that," Bruton said.

"Okay, so I'm hit with the L.A. Trip," Bambi said, "but it's better than being hit with the Black Mountain, P.A. Trip. I mean, everybody back there is dying of lung disease. Black Lung Disease, they call it. They did a scientific-medical number on our whole town a few years back. It was quite a famous

study back in the East. They figured out the mean life expectancy for males over twenty-one years old in Black Mountain to be fifty-six years old. I mean, fifty-six, man!"

"How did you make it out to Lotus City?" Bruton said. "To Los Angeles?"

"My dad left a little money. From his union insurance plan. After the funeral, my mom and my brother asked me what I was going to do with it and I said 'I'm packing up my toothbrush and my few knock-out clothes and I'm catching a bus for the West Coast.' My precise words, Mr. Private Eye."

"And from there?"

"I cooled it," said Bambi Fawne, now seeming a million miles from ever having been anyone named Dorthea Crabtree. "I read the *Barb* and the *Free Press* and hung-out around Berkeley for a while and then drifted down to L.A. and got this two-room apartment in Pasadena with this black chick who advertised for a roomie in the *Free Press*. She was a counter-girl at a taco stand in Glendale. She was picking up some extra money as an actress. In the daytime, television soap operas as a waitress.

"You know the number I mean, where they always have a scene once a week inside some Italian restaurant where



the hero and the heroine chew breadsticks and gulp martinis and discuss whether Louise ought to have the abortion or tell Dr. Bedside Manner it's his kid before he makes that first cut.

"My roomie would serve the martinis and take the orders for Italian Rigmorole with a side order of meatballs. Can you beat that? A black chick getting a part as a waitress in an Italian restaurant? She had an A.C.L.U. lawyer and everything when she went up for the part. The lawyer dude simply said the law indicated they had to have a black on the set in

front of the cameras, or they'd close the whole studio lot down by morning."

"How did you meet Victor Grasso?" Bruton asked, sincerely curious.

"The Mill," said Bambi, with no regrets showing in her brittle voice. "You must put yourself into the picture. Photo art, body painting studios, topless dancing for the Johns, that sort of thing. You hustle and you wiggle all your best parts and you say yes a lot when there's a yacht party or some orgy up in Hollywood Hills. I mean, you just have to be...effusive with your body, do you know what I mean?"

"I get the picture, X-rated though it is," said Bruton.

Suddenly the little face turned on him, sunglasses off and the unremarkable eyes now remarkably alive with pure antagonism. "Let's have one thing out in the open right now, Buzz-Saw Bruton, before we take one more step into what you presume to think is deep muck. I didn't make the world. And I didn't make the Johns the way they are. And I didn't make *me*! So you keep coming on with these very cutesy closet jokes and you can consider this little interview at an end."

"You mean that," Bruton suddenly realized.

"You bet I mean that. And I just got off this merry-go-round, in case you had any more questions."

BRUTON TOOK a moment's breathing space to look out at pool water. A purple rubber seahorse had it all to himself and for a moment, Bruton felt no one wanted to kill anyone. But only for a moment did he feel that.

"Bambi," he said carefully, "who wants Victor Grasso dead?"

The sunglasses were back on. It didn't precisely indicate total incommunicado; but the action served to notify Bruton a wall was going up.

"Maybe a lot of people in... *filmdom*. I mean, the Supreme Court come-down has not exactly been a spoonful of honey for the people in our business."

"Meaning if you sell peaches to the world and the scientific and dietetic communities suddenly rule peaches to be harmful to your health..."

"...the peaches magnates are hurting," Bambi Fawne picked up. "And so are all the little people who work for the peaches magnates. You know for a jerk private eye, you come around very fast."

"I went to night school," Bruton said. "So sum it up. Who

wants to see the local King of Peaches six feet under-land?"

"Two directors I know," said Bambi Fawne. "They did my two pictures last year. Did you know I had the lead in two flicks? Ya, isn't- that heavy? Man, you oughta *know* that a girl can really only count on one full-length feature in her entire *career*. The Johns don't like to see the same faces, bodies and... *choreography*... twice. That's a whole other psyche trip all by itself. Any-way, I did two last year. They each grossed over a million- apiece nationwide."

"Grossed isn't- a bad way to put it."

"Okay, okay. So it's very gross stuff. But Vic says the Johns really need the blue flicks until they set up neighborhood headshops, you know? Shrink clinics, and all like that. I mean, I made very good money with Vic's pictures."

"Nobody kicks during prosperous times. But who would want Victor Grasso dead in the lean times, Bambi?"

"My last two directors, like I said, and the backers. I don't know who they are but they have those Malibou addresses and a lot of straight income to sink into blue films. I mean, *big* people. Politicians and bank people and even some of the goody-goody producers of the

G-rateds. I mean, it could curl your hair to find out, from what I hear."

The petite, pink toes were squirming in their mink-covered Indian sandals. "Hey, I need a dip, you know?" Bambi Fawne said suddenly, though not leaping up and kicking off her mink footwear.

Bruton pressed his question.

"Who else, Bambi?"

"You want me to level?"

"Like a word to your best friend."

"Nobody."

"Repeat that, Bambi."

"Like, I can't think of *anybody* who would want to waste Vic just because his little blue movie factory broke down."

"Why do you say that? How can you know there isn't some disenchanting backer lurking in the background?"

"Oh, wow, man, are *you* Judy Holliday in drag! What do you think this operation is, any-way? A bunch of clowns hanging by their thumbs on a shoe-string? Do you *actually think* there are a lot of last pennies in this?"

"I'm here on this earth to be taught," Bruton said.

"Okay. So school's out, Buzz-z-z Saw Bruton. This whole tinsel-town number becomes a tax write-off the minute it turns sour. In other,

more street-oriented terms, it is bought and paid for."

"By...organizational people," Bruton hedged.

"*Syndicate* shouldn't stumble over a rough tongue like yours, Mr. Bruton."

"The term doesn't have me reeling backward into the pool, Ms. Fawne."

"Well, charming for you, Mr. Bruton."

"So it isn't a question of local people rushing at Victor Grasso with knives and guns," Bruton said.

"Mr. Bruton," said Bambi Fawne, in a grown-up way Bruton still was finding hard to believe, "it isn't a question of anybody rushing at Victor *with* or *about* anything here in L.A., unless he picked up enemies somewhere along the way, who followed him to the coast with grudges to settle. All I know is what Victor tells me."

"Which is?"

"Which is...that this whole cycle, the time for blue films, will come around again. And when it does, I get the lead in the biggest, wide-screen, color-sound blue flick this country has ever burned its eye-brows over. And after that, a blue musical where I smolder and vamp and dance like Gwen Verdon in *Damn Yankees*, except without a stitch on. Vic promised."

"In hard writing, of course."

The eyes widened assuredly, as if to tell Bruton Bambi Fawne was a street-wise young lady who definitely knew hustle and snow when she saw them. "He had me up half the night last week signing papers. The whole garbanzo. Promotional tours, ad campaigns, the queen of half a dozen grand prix motorcycle races and hill-climbs. I mean the shooting script you could put on the back of a matchbook cover, but it was all legit. I know legit when I see it, Mr. Bruton."

"Where does Mr. Grasso keep his papers? You know, the private ones. And maybe including the papers you signed guaranteeing you Miss Blue Queen of 1974?"

"Gosh. In his study, I think. Next to the room where the pool table is. That's where he had me sign everything. He has one of those cute little wall safes. Behind a painting of cubey things. Picasso did it. It's no mail-order print, you know. It's the real article. Vic says there are only two commodities safe from the ups and downs of the money market. Paintings and diamonds."

A cool thought zoomed through Bruton's brain then. Cool and bluish and ever so heartless. It dove-tailed nicely with the rifle shots carefully

choreographed by Bruno the climbing marksman.

"Vic ought to be ashamed of himself," Bruton told Bambi Fawne.

"Of what?"

"Of doing such a terrible thing to a sweet young miner's daughter from Black Mountain."

"Do what? He made me a star pretty soon. Do what?"

"Tell me, Bambi, what time does Vic Grasso retire?"

"Him? Oh, probably never. He isn't on social security, I don't think."

"I meant what time does he crash? Bag it? Go beddy-bye?"

"Oh. Gosh. Let me see. Yes. Eleven-thirty. Every night, except for when there are parties. Like the one last night. We used up ten cases of whipped cream last night and we..."

Bruton closed his eyes lightly and told Bambi he'd rather not she go into that sort of thing. After all, he had a mother still living in San Gabriel.

Instead, he said, "You want to hear something terrible?"

"Sure."

"Then be awake around midnight tonight when I come by your room. One other thing. Is there a public telephone near the house?"

"There's a booth at a service station about three miles back down Poinsettia. What's up?"

"I have to call an L.A.P.D. detective-type about a midnight burglary. They pay out good money sometimes for tips on crimes, you know."

"Yeah? A crime? Where?"

"As a matter of fact," said Bruton, "it hasn't happened yet."

Bambi wrinkled her nose. Bruton left her like that.

AS A SAFE, Victor Grasso's was like breaking into a candy-store in Canarsie, but its contents were quite a few choice cuts above jaw-breakers and licorice whips.

The Victor Grasso philosophy about the immutability of paintings and diamonds had been no idle musing. Three gold-leafed certificates proclaimed him the owner of a Van Gogh valued at \$53,000, a Seurat appraised at \$46,000 and a Gauguin checking in at a mere \$105,000.

Bruton wondered wryly what his mother's San Gabriel art league acrylic dabblers would say to criminals heavily dabbling into classical art. They would probably rank it right up there with such other sacrileges as Beatle songbooks for hymnals and coke machines in confessionals.

The house seemed quiet, but it was an illusion. Bruton knew Moody was somewhere in the

dark vicinity, perhaps going for Vic Grasso at the very moment. Bruton had made enough shuffling racket and whispery noises at his door.

He kept pawing through the safe's contents in the dull light of the desk lamp. He found three diamond necklaces in velvet cases, none of which had to be rushed under the eye of a jeweler's loupe to convince Bruton they were authentic. The safe held plenty of cold cash. He was glad Grasso had paid him his retainer, or he might have been tempted to take it now.

He pawed on.

Other odds and ends cropped up. There was an insurance policy indicating that if any of three fox-fur boas fell into thieving clutches, an insurance firm calling itself World-Wide Properties Insurance would reimburse the insured, one Victor Remo Grasso, \$3,500 for each boa journeying off without Grasso's consent. Impressive finds, all of them; but Bruton still hadn't found what he wanted to put the confusing bits and pieces into one neat, identifiable object.

Until the next two items came out in his fumbling hand. Another impossible piece of work for a one-armed man but Bruton was learning to live with the avalanche of dis-

coveries of things he couldn't do.

He took the two documents to the desk and examined them under closer, harsher light. The whole garbano. He separated the contracts and legal documents from what he wanted. The two insurance policies. One was a straight decreasing-term-payment life insurance number. The other a double-indemnity accidental-death issue.

The first paid the beneficiary \$100,000 straight across the top of the table. The second, coming across in the unfortunate event of accidental death only, paid a staggering \$200,000. It contained a string of confusing small-print clauses longer than the Harbor Freeway, involving everything from corporate and personal income loss due to the sudden death of the insured to fancy, fast-footstepping payment instructions which allowed the bereaving beneficiary to slither around a hefty hunk of taxes.

After reading the names and numbers of all the players in this little insurance razzle-dazzle he put everything in a neat pile on the desktop and sat down in Victor Grasso's black leather swivel chair. His watch's lighted dial read 12:18 a.m. You could never depend upon fat people to be on time;

they always had to use twice the energy to do half the work.

And then Bruton heard the soft footfalls outside the study door. It opened cautiously and Moody filled the shadowy frame. In his hand was a very large pistol. Bruton was disappointed. He was expecting a sneaky, quiet little eight mm job from inside a sock garter.

Victor Grasso followed Moody inside. Seeing Bruton lolling in his chair, unarmed and open-faced, he deferred turning on any overhead lighting, which was all to Bruton's advantage.

"Hand caught in the cookie jar, Bruton," he said, with polite displeasure.

"Nice Picasso," said Bruton. "Didn't Picasso say something like 'Artists are men of many parts, consequently they are often inconsistent of their work and style'?"

"You have the blood of my possessions on that one good arm of yours, Bruton, and you got the nerve to spout philosophy? This is what I get for picking a private detective blindfolded out of the yellow pages."

"Yeah, well I plead guilty for not being too excellent at this sort of work. Doggedly persistence is more what I am."

Brasso wasn't amused. "People of dogged persistence belong on assembly lines or in civil



service. But you seem to have persisted long and well enough to have learned something about me you might have been safer and better off not knowing."

"That's what they say about knowledge, all right," Bruton said. "You are speaking of the insurance policies, I gather. Strange that they should be carried by World-Wide Properties Insurance. A couple of one-time-only policies for a quick cash kick-back, Grasso?"

Grasso was busy leering. Moody was active in clenching and unclenching his fists. Bruton didn't know where Bruno was, but he wasn't going to send out any night letters.

"Clever hiring me as a body-guard, Grasso. The perfect set-up. A small industry at a standstill, lots of angered employes and business associates, both real and imagined. I bought it all the way down the line."

"Until?" Grasso said through some gold teeth flashing amid white ones.

"Until Bruno pulled his sniper act for my benefit. There was something out of place in the scene of its aftermath I didn't recognize right away. But I didn't force it. One of my major faults, forcing issues. I was the worst high school freethrow shooter in the history

of Pasadena High. By forcing." "Charming," said Grasso. "I love sports anecdotes."

"It came to me, Grasso, when I zipped back to the scene at the pool. When I returned from chasing Bruno through the woods. And found everybody up and out of the pool except Bambi when it hadn't even been established the sniper had run off or out of shells."

Grasso's polite grin was fading like a summer tan in late fall. "So, Bruton?"

"So, that made the intended target very questionable," Bruton said. "It couldn't be either you or Moody any longer. You both leapt out of that pool like two men who knew they were perfectly safe. That left Bambi, still hiding and shaky in the water, very confused and very afraid for her life. That left nothing to do but find the motive."

"Run it on out, Bruton," said Grasso. "You're going to be killed for a thief anyway. You may as well go out a temporary hero to your craft."

"The motive was a stalled industry and your rapidly approaching bankruptcy. And a ready-made Eastern arm of the syndicate from which you could purchase a little short-term double-indemnity life insurance. You've probably broken some federal and state laws

there by overlooking the fact that even one-time, hurry-up, one-policy insurance firms are required to register with state and federal insurance commissions.

"The policies on Bambi Fawne's life make interesting reading, especially the beneficiaries. Yourself on one policy and World-Wide Properties Insurance on the other. Everybody lands on his feet but Bambi Fawne, the expendable product. I wasn't hired as your bodyguard, Mr. Grasso, I was hired as your witness to the murder of Bambi Fawne as a presumably innocent bystander. An accidental death, double payment on the life insurance policies and fresh dirty money to put the props under your sagging film world until a substitute hustle came down the pike."

"Let me know when you've put a period to this deductive oratory," Victor Grasso said. "Moody has a very distasteful job to do and he's the kind of man who becomes impatient when he isn't allowed to get on with his work."

"WE ALL have our little jobs to do," came a new voice suddenly, out of a darkened corner of the study as Hal Demion and two police detectives moved up into the small patch of light.

Bambi Fawne hung at Demion's shoulder, casting murderous looks at Victor Grasso.

Demion showed Grasso his detective's badge and identification card, which caused Grasso's fatty face to scowl like a little kid who'd just had an ocean of rain dumped on his birthday party.

Hal Demion smiled at Moody and Grasso commensurately. "Sorry about the intrusion, gentlemen, but I'm afraid I may have solid grounds here for a conspiracy to commit murder. Then there's the matter of possible fraud concerning these insurance policies. I'll have to scoop them up and take them along because of their possible evidential nature. Actually, I think we have two counts of attempted murder here. The immediate attempt here tonight. And the long-range one planned against Miss Fawne."

"Victor," hissed Bambi Fawne, "I wouldn't make another movie for you if you got me Burt Reynolds for a co-star. You were going to waste me all along. You don't belong in prison, you belong under a rock."

"Bambi," Grasso said, "you belong in an acting school, in the slow group."

"Eeouuwww!" screamed

Bambi Fawne in raging indignance, making a feline leap for Victor Grasso's throat, but succeeding only in tearing a few fingernail scars in Grasso's shirt before both Hal Demion and Bruton were able to pull her away.

The two detectives led the scowling Grasso and Moody outside to the patrol car parked at the gate.

"I'll have to file a report," said Demion, "but that can wait an hour or so. I need to talk with you a little more, anyway, Bruton. So how about some coffee?"

"Sounds great," Bruton smiled.

"Me too?" asked Bambi Fawne.

"You too," Demion replied. Bambi smiled at him.

Before the three of them left, Bambi Fawne picked up a few of her more expensive possessions. She rode with Bruton, who followed Demion, with no

body looking back or sparing any speed until they were safely ensconced over coffee in an all-night restaurant in Glendale.

Bambi Fawne seemed crestfallen. "Here the two of you go almost to the old wall to save my life and it turns out you won't even get paid for it."

"Indeed the contrary," Bruton said. "Everyone's well aware policemen are paid on a twenty-four-hour-a-day basis. And my cash retainer from Grasso was more than enough to cover any costs I had. Everybody wins."

"Except you, Bruton," Hal Demion said. "Your mother called this afternoon. You really have to tell her she can't use the Investigations Division as an answering service."

"So how does that make me a loser?" Bruton said.

Demion grinned very nicely. "She wants the bird bath moved again," he said.

MY FRIEND, STRADIVARIUS

by Jerry Jacobson

It's Unusual!

It's Suspenseful!

It's Coming Soon!

Death of a Mother's Boy



by HERBERT HARRIS

It's not nice to fool your mother, but at forty Sankey thought he could: His game proved fatal.

EVEN IN DEATH, Gerald Sankey looked handsome, although the death-mask still betrayed something of the peevish, spoiled boy.

"Not terribly young, I think,"

Inspector Barton commented.

The police-doctor shrugged. "Fortyish. The thick fair hair makes him look boyish... a bit of a mother's boy."

"And a bachelor," the C.I.D.

man added. "When a forty-year-old unmarried mother's boy gets knocked off in his flat, one has to look at the homo angle."

"Quite," the doctor said, "but at the other side too. Some mother's boys have a curious attraction for women."

"The porter of the flats could help us there maybe," Inspector Barton said. He turned to Sergeant Ellis. "We'll have to talk to the porter and some of the other tenants."

Sergeant Ellis said, "His mother is still outside, sir. You said there were several things you wanted to ask her."

"There are, too. Let's talk to her, then."

It was Mrs. Sankey, Gerald's mother, who had found him stabbed to death. She lived only a short distance away and from time to time called on him.

Her son had given her a key, so that she could look after the flat when he was away. Having rung and got no reply—which she thought strange, knowing that he ought to be there—she had let herself in.

She had, in fact, called on her son before nine in the morning, and Inspector Barton asked: "Do you usually call on your son so early?"

"Not always," she told him. She was in her sixties, a rather hard-faced woman, Barton

thought, the possessive type probably.

"He usually left for the office between nine and half-past," she went on. "I wanted to catch him before he left to see if he could come and dine with me one evening."

"I see." He thought Mrs. Sankey was acting somewhat unemotionally. He said, "For one who has found her son dead—stabbed—you don't seem greatly upset, if I may say so."

"I'm not an hysterical person, Inspector."

"Perhaps you and your son were not on good terms?"

Mrs. Sankey hesitated. "Lately we have drifted apart," she admitted. "My son had changed. This is why I wanted him to dine with me—I wanted to talk to him."

"About what?"

"First the business. When my husband died, my son took over the family printing business... printing and publishing. I was worried at first. My son hadn't much strength of character, but there were good people to guide him, and I thought..."

"These people," Barton cut in. "You mean staff?"

"Yes. The admirable Miss Lang to begin with—first my late husband's secretary, then Gerald's when he took over. Julia Lang has dedicated her-

self to the business. But so has Alan Strode—my husband's right-hand man, though Gerald has never taken to him."

"There was friction between your son and Strode?"

"I'm afraid so. Gerald wanted to get rid of him."

"Why?"

"My son got rather lax—turning up late at the office, setting a bad example. Alan Strode objected. Gerald told him if he didn't like it he could clear out."

"But he didn't?"

"No. I made him stay. I'm still principal shareholder, after all. This was something I wanted to talk to Gerald about."

"He got on well with Miss Lang?"

"Splendidly. She's been absolutely everything to him."

"In the business, of course?"

Mrs. Sankey eyed the inspector sharply. "Well, naturally! I mean she waited on him hand and foot. Every day she got his desk ready before he went in—clean blotter, pencils sharpened, inkwell filled, trays tidied, a fresh rose in a small vase—a most conscientious and devoted person, Inspector. Gerald wouldn't have parted with her for anything."

"And the others on the staff?"

"Nobody of any importance, Inspector."

"They *could* be, Mrs. Sankey," the C.I.D. man argued gently. "What other women did your son employ?"

"You're not implying an improper relationship?"

"I'm gathering information," Barton answered politely.

"Well, there's a girl who joined the firm just recently. A red-haired girl who came from some art school, to work on book-jacket designs, you know. A Miss Mancini, I think."

"Was there any sort of friction between your son and Miss Mancini?"

"I hardly think so, Inspector. Gerald never mentioned her."

"Did your son have any girlfriends?" Barton asked bluntly.

"Not that I know of," Mrs. Sankey replied. "Gerald was never one to chase after women."

"Very likely," Barton answered with a hint of acidity, "but there might have been some women chasing after him."

A photographer and a fingerprint man were still working in Gerald Sankey's flat when the Inspector and Sergeant Ellis took their leave.

The doctor had said that Sankey had died of a stab wound in the early hours of the morning. A thin-bladed, sharp-pointed paper-knife had



been thrust fully into Sankey's back, piercing his heart.

The two C.I.D. men had talked to the porter, but only to be told that an attack of arthritis had kept him confined to his rooms on the other side of the building, so he knew little about the tenants and cared even less.

Others who *might* have observed Sankey's callers preferred to play the usual game of hear-nothing-see-nothing-say-nothing.

Barton looked at his watch as Sergeant Ellis drove off. "Is it really only quarter-to-ten?"

"Yes, sir. We were at Sankey's flat by nine."

"It's not far to the family publishing business, is it?"

"No, sir, we should be there around ten-o'clock."

There was a pause, then Barton said. "You realize the office people should not know yet that the boss has been murdered?"

"Yes, sir. I thought somebody might ring Sankey's flat to find out why he wasn't in."

"He never got in until 9:30." Barton answered, "and that's only twenty minutes ago. Besides, the old girl said he had been turning up at the office late."

"They'll get a nasty shock when we break the news," Sergeant Ellis remarked.

"One of them might already know," Barton said grimly.

"You mean that chap Strode, sir?—the one Sankey wanted to chuck out?"

"Well, he's *one* suspect, naturally," Barton said. "But did you hear the old girl mention that Miss Mancini had red hair?"

"Yes, sir."

"I bet you didn't notice those long red hairs in Sankey's bed," Barton said.

Ellis smiled. "You've had more experience, sir."

"I hope you mean on police work," Barton retorted drily.

A pale woman in her early thirties, with dark hair and large dark eyes, greeted them.

"If it's Mr. Strode you're wanting," she said, "I'm afraid he had an appointment with his dentist and won't be in until later."

"Let's not bother about Mr. Strode for the moment," Barton told her politely. "You'll be Miss Lang?"

"Yes." She looked terribly worn and tired, Barton thought, and he sensed a tight tension underlying the secretarial smoothness.

Barton introduced himself and Sergeant Ellis, and Julia Lang wore a look that mixed bewilderment and concern.

"Mr. Sankey has been found dead, and we have reason to

suspect foul play," Barton told her non-committally.

"Oh, my God! How awful!"

"May we look around Mr. Sankey's office? His desk-diary, for one thing, could provide a clue—whom he was meeting last night, for instance?"

"Yes. . . yes, of course." She waved them towards the room which had been Sankey's office, and Barton strode in.

He allowed his eyes to range around the room. Then he stood by Sankey's swivel-chair, carefully noting everything on the desk.

After a few moments he turned to the secretary abruptly. "You know who was with Mr. Sankey last night, don't you?"

She swallowed. "But. . . how should I know?"

"You know only too well that Miss Mancini was with him. They had become extremely intimate friends, hadn't they?"

"Who told you that?" Her voice was low, wavering.

"Never mind," Barton said. "But you know Miss Mancini was there, because you were there too."

"Good God, are you suggesting. . .?"

"I'm not suggesting you were in the flat while Miss Mancini was actually there. But perhaps you were watching the place?—you saw her

leave?—then you went in yourself—is that right?”

Julia Lang stared at him. Her face was completely without any color. There was a twitch below one eye and her mouth trembled.

“You were in love with Gerald Sankey, Miss Lang?” he continued.

She looked at the floor, seeming almost on the point of tears. “Yes, I’ve loved him ever since he came here.”

“You have been quite intimate friends?”

“Yes, but I felt sure he would marry me. His mother thought a lot of me. And Gerald *would* have married me, if only...”

“If only Miss Mancini hadn’t come on the scene and ruined everything? You were appalled by their growing intimacy, by the way this girl was ruining him!”

“Yes!—yes!”

“You had a showdown with him? He hurt your pride badly? He told you bluntly maybe that it was the younger girl he wanted, and that any hope of marrying you was utterly out of the question?”

She looked at him with perplexity. “It’s almost as if you

knew everything—that had taken place...”

Barton nodded. “The pattern became clear, Miss Lang, after I’d decided it was you who had stabbed Sankey. ‘Woman scorned’ and all that.”

She had begun to cry, and Inspector Barton felt pity for her.

“As soon as I walked into Sankey’s office, I realised that you—only you of all the staff—knew that the boss was dead.”

He spoke gently. “You had neglected his desk, Miss Lang. There was yesterday’s blotter covered with doodles...an ashtray not emptied...a full paper-basket...pens and pencils in disarray...yesterday’s flower wilting in its vase...and it all added up...”

“You had neglected your unfailing morning ritual, Miss Lang, for the simple reason that you knew Sankey wouldn’t be coming into the office...you knew he wouldn’t ever be coming in again...”

She sobbed as he took her arm. “I did love him,” she said in a whisper...

“Yes,” the Inspector said with a sigh. “Come along, please.”

—YOU CAN BUY “MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE” EVERYWHERE

...AND THEN PUT OUT THE LIGHT

She was alone, afraid and sometime soon her house would be ravished again. Maybe a gun was the answer...

by C. B. GILFORD

THE POLICE arrived within ten or twelve minutes of her phone call. Two strapping fellows, both young, both handsome, both polite, very helpful.

"Yes, you've had a burglar, Mrs. Frayne," the first one said. He played the beam of his flashlight on the window sill and showed her the marks of the jimmy and the cut screen wire. "These low ranch houses are pretty easy to get into. And this guy must have had some practice."

Verna Frayne shivered inside her quilted bathrobe. There'd been a stranger in her house, a faceless invader who had come and gone invisibly though not quite silently, and who, before his departure, had wandered freely and fearlessly through her house for perhaps a quarter of an hour. A terror-filled quarter of an hour! Her terror of



course. Her house! Her private house!

"The lab boys will look around outside tomorrow in the daylight," the nice young policeman went on. "All we could do out there right now is mess things up."

She nodded and tried to smile through her tears of anger and nervousness.

"Mrs. Frayne," the second policeman asked, "have you checked to see what's missing?"

No, she hadn't. She had barely summoned the courage, when the tiny sounds made by the stealthy intruder had ceased with the tiny squeak of the screen door on his exit, to creep out into the hallway to the telephone. But she hadn't gathered her wits to take an inventory.

"Would you look around, please, Mrs. Frayne? You can make a complete job of it later. But is there anything obvious?"

She tried to cooperate. All the drawers in her own bureau were half open—yes, he'd been right there in the bedroom! Her purse was yawning wide on the dressing table. "I think I had about forty dollars. It seems to be gone now." And her wristwatch—it had been a nice one—she'd bought it for herself. No missing jewelry though. Her rings, not worth much, had been on her hand, and the

burglar hadn't attacked her, hadn't even approached the bed.

"How about the other rooms?"

Yes, the silver! She hadn't even thought about it until this moment. Her sterling silver, her pride and joy—all of it—he'd just carted away the whole case. She started to cry.

"Well anyway, your TV's still here," one of the nice young men pointed out.

"He must have known," she answered bitterly. "It's five years old, and the picture keeps jumping all the time."

One of the policemen had been writing in a little notebook. Now he looked up.

"You gave your name as Mrs. Frayne," he said. "You're married then?"

"Yes."

"Your husband not at home?"

She shook her head.

"Out of town?"

"No."

The two young men exchanged quick glances, and one of them looked at his watch. "It's close to two o'clock."

"My husband," she said reluctantly, "is playing poker."

The young men exchanged glances again. Perhaps they smiled. The very possibility of their smiling made her furious. "He's out later than usual."

"We'll hang around till he

shows up," the nice officer reassured her.

That was when they heard the sound of the front door opening. Verna Frayne didn't even want to look. She knew who it was. The step, the fumbling at the door, were all too familiar.

"Hey, what's goin' on here?"

He stood there in the doorway. Although there was a police car parked in front of his house, and two policemen standing in the middle of his living room, he really didn't appear to be terribly concerned. "What's goin' on here?" Just curiosity. He didn't sound worried. Because as usual, he'd had too much beer.

Yes, his fat face was rather red. Especially his nose. His blue eyes were a bit watery. And his voice was just plain old friendly.

"Are you Mr. Frayne?"

"That's me."

"Your wife called us, Mr. Frayne. You've had a burglar."

Then for the first time he looked at her. A frown dented his forehead. He blinked his eyes, trying very hard to focus.

"Gosh, Verna," he began.

"You—you—" she sputtered. But she couldn't think of the proper epithet. "You left me here all alone, you—"

Inarticulate, frustrated, overcome with rage, she turned

away from him, flew back to the bedroom and slammed the door. Never to open it again that night. But that wasn't, however, when she decided to kill him...

IN THE MORNING she fixed his breakfast. Out of habit rather than out of love. Tomato juice. Coffee. Toast. Nothing else. He never had much of an appetite after a night of poker and beer. He sat slurping and munching without conversation. He didn't try any of that until after he'd wiped his mouth with his napkin and lurched to his feet.

"Gee, Verna," he began.

"Gee what, Arnold?" she countered, whirling at him from the stove and her softly boiling egg.

"Gee, a burglar," he replied weakly. "Those cops said he took your silver."

"That's right. My good silver, all of it. The case, too." She made no effort to conceal her anguish.

"And money out of your purse—"

"My week's grocery money, and another ten I had a place for."

"But he didn't take the TV!" He tried to smile with his flabby wet lips.

"No," she said scornfully. "He just took my property. Nothing of yours. He probably knew you

wanted to watch the baseball game tonight."

"Basketball, Verna," he corrected her. "This is the basketball season."

She withered him with a look.

"Look, I'll buy you some more silverware, Verna—"

"With what? You'll give up beer for a whole week maybe?"

"It's insured, Verna. I always keep everything insured. You can take the insurance money and buy some more."

"That pattern," she screamed at him, "has been discontinued!"

Doggedly he tried to comfort her. "You can buy another pattern."

"That was the only pattern I have ever liked!"

"Maybe a fur coat. You've always wanted a fur coat."

"Hah!" She spat her venom at him. "I'll never see that insurance money. You'll buy beer with it. You'll lose it at the poker table. I'll bet you lost last night. Sure you did. You always lose."

"A couple of bucks."

"But you'd rather drink beer and lose money than stay home with me."

"Twice a week, Verna. Just twice a week—"

"That burglar wouldn't even have come into the house if you'd been here. He saw there

wasn't any car in the garage, so he figured there wasn't anybody home. Then when he got in he saw there was just a woman in the bed. So he went right on with what he was doing. What's to stop him? No man in the house. That's the story of my life. No man in the house."

"Just twice a week," he murmured softly.

"What do I get out of this marriage anyway? Companionship? Hah! I've been abandoned!"

"Twice a—"

"And this is the last straw. I'm not just lonely any more. I'm terrified. Every night you leave me from now on I'll sit here terrified. You hear that, Arnold Frayne? You'll be off playing poker, and I'll sit here biting my nails—a nervous wreck!"

With that she stomped off to her bedroom, slamming the door, leaving behind her a hardening egg and a confused, contrite husband. She slammed the bedroom door and threw herself upon the bed. But even that wasn't when she decided to kill him.

The police didn't arrive again until long after Arnold had left for work. They puttered around outside, looking for footprints beneath the window, or perhaps other clues. But they didn't

spend too much time at it, and apparently found nothing in the way of clues.

A nice young officer came inside, a different one from last night. This one wore an ordinary suit, not a uniform. He wanted to know if Verna had a complete list of missing property.

She went through it again, though there was nothing to add. And as she recited her woes, her rage at Arnold was re-kindled. She added silent comments to herself. He hadn't offered to replace the cash lost from her purse, had he? And he hadn't come up with a solution to her discontinued silverware pattern, had he? Oh, how she hated him!

At the moment she had a sympathetic ear.

"Officer," she faltered, "do burglars ever come back to the same place?"

The young man smiled. "The law of averages is against it, I'd say. The guy really didn't get enough here to make this place famous as a place to hit. I don't think you have too much to worry about."

"But I am worried," she insisted.

"Oh sure, it's natural. You'll be nervous for a while."

She shook her head stubbornly. "I don't think I'll ever get over it."

"Is your husband gone at night very often?"

"Half the time," she said.

"Maybe you ought to get a dog," the young man said. "Dogs give people a sense of security, and sometimes they actually scare off a prowler."

"I hate dogs," Verna said petulantly. "I'm allergic to dog hair."

"Well, there are a lot of different kinds of burglar alarms and warning systems. Probably the one thing you shouldn't do is get a gun. Guns are more dangerous to homeowners than they are to criminals."

Verna stared at the young man. He had sandy hair, long sideburns, and a cute little mustach. And he seemed very earnest, very sure of the truth of what he had just said.

As she stared, she was sure of something too. Sure that that was the moment she decided to kill Arnold.

SHE MADE Arnold buy the gun. Strategic, she thought. It would look much better, she decided—later, when all the questions would be asked. When maybe the nice young man with the sandy hair would ask the questions, it would be much better if she could say truthfully that the deceased had bought the gun.

"I want a gun," she an-

nounced two days after the burglary.

"What for?" Arnold wondered.

"To protect myself when you're gone at night."

"Honey," he said, "if you're that scared, I'll just stay home, that's all there is to it."

But he didn't stay home, of course. Not Arnold! Oh, he did for a week or so. Then when the urge to return to the boys and the beer and the poker became too strong, and when he started thinking up reasons why he just had to go out, she renewed her demand for a gun.

"How about a dog?" he countered.

"I hate dogs."

"But you're afraid of guns."

"I'm more afraid of being here alone."

Eventually he succumbed. He brought home a gun. The purchase conveniently recorded in his name. A little black gun. With bullets. But the nearest thing, he said, to being harmless and still being a gun.

"Do you mean," she demanded, "that it won't kill anybody?"

Arnold shrugged his fat shoulders. "Oh sure, it'll kill somebody if you hit 'em in the right place. It'll do that all right. But all you'd really have to do, honey, is fire it at the ceiling. That'd scare the guy

off. You wouldn't have to kill him."

She despised him when he called her "honey." But she forced herself to treat him civilly enough while he showed her how to use the gun. How to load, how to aim, how to fire. He termed the weapon a "little automatic." It held a clip of half a dozen little bullets. Surely, she thought, she couldn't miss with half a dozen bullets fired at point-blank range.

She re-considered everything once again. Strangely enough, besides liking beer and poker Arnold very much liked insurance. Perhaps because he worked in an insurance office. Everything was always well covered by insurance. The house. The personal property. The car. Their health. Their lives. Arnold's life especially. To the tune of a hundred and fifty thousand dollars.

With that hundred and fifty grand, with the proceeds from the sale of the house and a few odds and ends, she could lead the sort of life she wanted, where she controlled the money. A nice snug apartment somewhere maybe, secure and safe. A hundred and fifty thousand—that was probably about as much as Arnold would make the rest of his life—if he lived. And if he lived, that sum



would have to support two, not one.

And besides she hated him.

So she rehearsed.

"I heard this noise, officer—and I thought it was a burglar. There was a burglar in my house about three months ago. The same way, on a night when my husband was gone. Oh, it was awful. I was so scared. I was scared this time too. But my husband had bought me this little gun. So I'd feel safer when he was gone at night. I didn't want him to stay home every night just for my sake. He enjoyed playing poker so much. So I took the gun, and I let him show me how to fire it. 'If it's dark, just aim at the noise,' he said.

"Well, I did just what I'd been told. The noise woke me up. I looked beside me in the bed—Arnold wasn't there. I was all alone. Some stranger was stumbling around in the dark. Now Arnold never did that. He always just turned on the lights. So I didn't dream—how was I to know he'd had so much beer that he must not have been able to find the light switch? So I did what I'd been told. I fired at the noise. I guess I was so scared by the sound of the gun that I couldn't take my finger off the trigger. The gun just kept on shooting till it was empty. And then there was a thud, like a body falling on the floor. I switched on the bed lamp, and there was—there was Arnold."

That was the way she rehearsed it. Wasn't it all so delightfully simple!

Friday night was the night she chose. Because on Friday night, more than on Tuesday night, Arnold was always a little later, had had a little more beer, had lost a little more money. All of which caused her to be a little angrier at him, hate him a little more—and thus be steeled a bit better to the task.

On Friday night he left the house about seven-thirty. She didn't protest. What if he decided suddenly to stay home!

She locked the door after him, tidied the kitchen, watched TV. At eleven, still wakeful of course, she went to bed, following her customary routine precisely. At eleven thirty she stopped reading and put out the light.

Then for two hours she lay in the darkness, the gun beneath her pillow. At one-thirty, by the glowing hands on the alarm clock, she sat up in bed, retrieved the gun from beneath the pillow, and waited. About two or so she heard the car, and then his key in the lock.

She felt surprisingly calm. All the decisions had been made, reconsidered, and fortified. There were no doubts in her mind. Nothing left to do but to do it.

Shuffling in the dark of the living room. A stubbed toe. A whispered curse. By listening closely she knew exactly where he was, what he was doing. He took off his shoes so he wouldn't wake her, took off his jacket, his tie so there would be a minimum of disrobing in the bedroom, and he could tumble straight into bed and start snoring. The bedroom door opened. Stockinged feet on the rug.

"Turn on the vanity lamp, Arnold," she said suddenly. "You might as well. I'm awake."

"Huh?" He was surprised.

"I told you to turn on the vanity lamp."

He was sober enough anyway to understand her, and to find the lamp, and to find the switch. The light came on.

A very important part of her plan. Although she would tell the police that she fired blindly in the dark, she would actually fire in the light—because she didn't want to miss.

"Stand right where you are, Arnold."

He was standing over the lamp, both his hands still on it, one to hold it steady while the other found the switch. The bulb shone up into his face, so that he didn't see her right away.

"I said stand right there! Don't move!"

Probably because he was so full of beer, he obeyed her. He froze. He stayed frozen even when his blinking, watery eyes discovered her sitting on the bed, holding the gun, the gun aimed at him.

"It's okay, Verna," he mumbled. "It's me."

She found herself smiling. "I know it's you."

He still didn't understand.

"Well, put that crazy gun down," he said.

"No," she told him, "I'm going to shoot you."

She was enjoying this. She

watched his face, the slow paling of the beery glow in his cheeks, the gradual dawning of comprehension in the watery eyes. She didn't want to shoot him in the back. She wanted him to know exactly what was happening.

"You must be asleep," he muttered hoarsely, the first hint of desperation in his voice. "Wake up, Verna!"

"Oh, I'm wide awake." To demonstrate the fact, she slid her legs off the bed and stood up.

"It's me, Verna!"

"Oh yes, it's you all right. You're the one I'm going to shoot. You, my husband, Arnold Frayne."

He stayed glued to the lamp. "Why?"

"Because I want your life insurance."

"Verna—"

"And I hate you. You don't love me. You prefer your poker friends. So I'm getting even for all those years of neglect."

"You're crazy."

"Oh no. I know exactly what I'm doing."

"What good will my life insurance money do you in prison?"

"I won't be in prison, dear. I'll tell the police I thought I was shooting a burglar. I'll tell them I shot in the dark."

"But the light's on."

"Oh yes, it's on now, so I can see to shoot you, Arnold. But when you're dead, I'll turn it off."

Now he knew for sure. She could see it in his eyes. And she could see a cunning born there. What was going on in his little mind? Would he try to turn off the light so she couldn't see him? She walked two steps closer. If he made the slightest move, she would start shooting. She couldn't miss at this range, even in the dark.

"Verna, please—"

But he wasn't really begging. There was no humility in his voice. He was stalling. Did he think he could talk her out of it? How long should she let him go on trying? She studied his face. Not a muscle moved there. Perhaps he was simply petrified by fear. But his eyes disturbed her. A kind of presence in them she had never seen or recognized before. Cunning, that's what it looked like. The wheels and cogs grinding, as if he were examining her simple plan, trying to find a flaw in it. She let him play around with it for a minute or so.

"Verna, you'll never get away with this."

She pressed the trigger before he quite finished the sentence. The first bullet, she saw, hit him in the chest—a bit high maybe, but satisfactory. And

according to plan, she kept shooting.

It was somewhat confusing after that. The little gun kicked with each shot, but she remained each time. Arnold opened his mouth, but whatever words he managed to say were drowned out by the noise of the gun. He staggered forward, then back again, carrying the lamp with him. Perhaps he tried to raise it, to use it as a shield, or a weapon. But she stood her ground, and went right on with her business.

And finally the lamp went out. Hit by one of the bullets? Probably. So she didn't actually see him fall. In the darkness, after the echo of the last shot died away, she heard his body fall.

She returned to the bed lamp, switched it on, dropped the empty gun on the bed. Arnold and the vanity lamp were on the floor. And she was quite sure Arnold was satisfactorily dead.

She herself was still calm. Calm, collected, and rich. But she remembered the cunning in Arnold's eyes, and she remembered her plan too.

One must never underestimate the cleverness and thoroughness of the police. Surely they investigated a homicide with much more care than a mere burglary. She ap-

proached the body. The lamp bulb, she saw, had been shattered. But her story would be that this lamp had been off, she had fired in the dark. The police might very well check that little matter. The lamp switch was a bar that penetrated through the base of the socket. Press the black end in, lights off—press the white end in, lights on. The white side was in, of course, because the light, before the shattering of the bulb, had been on.

"Excuse me, Arnold," she said aloud, and pressed the black end.

Then she rose, went to the telephone, and called the police.

And when they arrived, she began with her well rehearsed speech. "I heard this noise, officer—"

There was the whole night-long business with questions, and everything about the body, and the eventual removal of the body. After hours of that sort of thing, somebody gave her a sedative, and she was put to bed in the house of a kind neighbor.

It was in the house of that neighbor, the next afternoon, that she received the second, fully expected visitation of the police. Not the pleasant, sandy-haired young man as she had hoped. A different fellow, older, rather ugly, gruff. He

was from Homicide, he said. Well, that was to be expected too.

This fellow listened to her story also. She tried not to make it quite word-for-word with the first time through, although she could easily have recited it that way. The Homicide man nodded as she prattled on. Not very sympathetically, she noted. He seemed an unfriendly sort.

"You shot in the dark?" he asked when she was finished.

She nodded.

"It never entered your mind that you could have been shooting at your husband."

"I'd just been waked up by a noise. All I could think of, I guess, was that other burglary. We had a burglar—"

"Yes, I know that, Mrs. Frayne. How long before you heard the noise—how long had you been asleep?"

She thought. "What time did it happen? I mean, what time did the accident happen?"

"You phoned the police about two-thirty."

"Well, I phoned right away."

"Well, let's say then you shot your husband between two and two thirty. Let me ask you again, how long had you been asleep?"

"Well, I think I turned off the lights and went to sleep about eleven-thirty."

"You were asleep then for two and a half hours or more?"

"Yes, I guess so."

"With the lights out?"

"Yes."

"And you awoke in the dark?"

"Yes."

"And fired the gun in the dark?"

"Of course."

The detective paused and licked his lips. "We can presume then, with the lights off for two and a half hours, the bulbs would be cold."

She stared at him. "I don't understand," she began.

"We did a complete examination of your husband's body, Mrs. Frayne," the man explained calmly. "There were slight flesh burns on the ends of several fingers, as if, when he died, he'd had his right hand on a hot light bulb—almost as if, Mrs. Frayne, the lamp had been turned on when he was shot."

She closed her eyes. What she saw inside her brain were Arnold's eyes, the last look in them, the look of cunning.

"Do you have any explanation for those burns?"

She would surely think of something.

"Then there's the matter of life insurance. A hundred and fifty thousand—Mrs. Frayne, are you listening to me?"

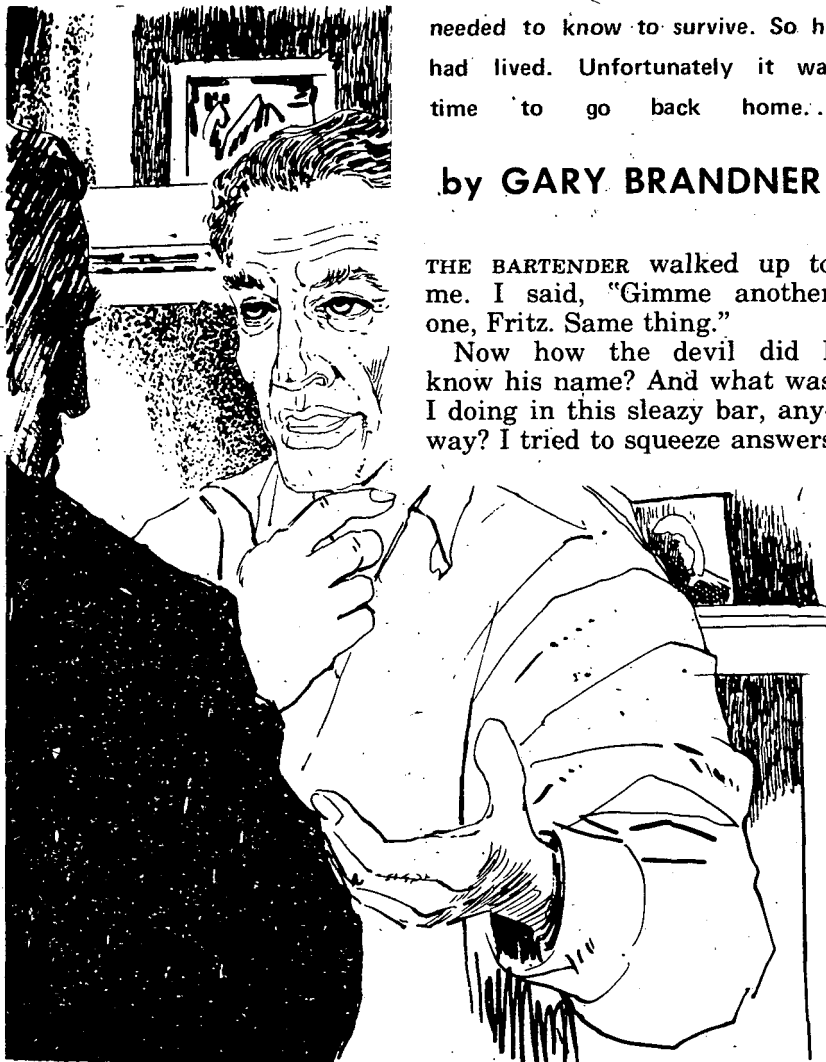
SURVIVOR

His friend had taught him all he needed to know to survive. So he had lived. Unfortunately it was time to go back home...

by GARY BRANDNER

THE BARTENDER walked up to me. I said, "Gimme another one, Fritz. Same thing."

Now how the devil did I know his name? And what was I doing in this sleazy bar, anyway? I tried to squeeze answers



out of my brain, but there was nothing in there but questions. I took a swallow of the raw whiskey and tried to think back to where the nightmare started.

I guess the plane crash was the beginning. We came down in a swamp, which was lucky in a way, since it cushioned the impact and drowned any fire before it could start. Otherwise Eddie Danko and I would have died along with the pilot. Maybe I wouldn't have thought it was so lucky if I'd known it would be six months before I ever felt really dry again.

That's how long they told me I was out there when I woke up in the hospital in Belém and knew at last I was out of the fever delirium.

"You are a lucky man, Mr. Cummings," the doctor told me. "We had given you up for dead. White men do not last long in the Brazilian jungles."

I told him that I wouldn't have lasted either if it hadn't been for Eddie Danko. He had what it takes to stay alive in the dark green night of the jungle. He had the will to survive. Many times I was ready to give in to the fever or the bugs or the swamp, but Danko wouldn't let me.

"Talk to me, Brian," he would say. "Tell me what it was like going to college. Tell

me about your family, your job, your home, what you're going to do when we get out of here."

I don't know if he really paid attention, but he did get me talking and interested in living again. Actually, my life had been pretty ordinary, at least until the crash, but Danko never seemed to get tired of listening to me.

Sometimes I would try to get him to talk about his own life. He'd always shrug it off and say there was nothing to tell. I knew there had to be some kind of a story, the way he ran out on the field at Rio just before we took off and offered to pay for passage on the plane I had chartered to Manaus. But if he didn't want to talk about it, that was his business. I was happy enough to have him ride along. I could save some money for Cummings & Son, the young engineering firm my father and I were building.

Eddie Danko didn't say much on the flight, and once we went down there was no time for talk. The first thing was to get away from the wreck. The pilot was obviously dead, and even as Danko and I crawled out of the cabin we could feel the plane sinking into the bog.

For more than a day we half-walked, half-swam through clinging green mud before we reached reasonably solid

ground. There my engineering experience did me some good, and I put up a rude shelter where we could rest out of the way of the water that dripped incessantly from the tangled roof of branches.

Danko set out snares for small animals and foraged for edible plants and insects. There was never any dry wood for a fire, so we ate everything raw. We expected somebody would come soon and find us. Nobody did.

Then the fever started. It came from the brackish water we drank, or maybe from the biting insects. In the weeks that followed, one or both of us always had the fever. We would travel a little and stop, then move on a little more. Neither of us could have made it alone. If I'd had to bet on which one of us would come out, I'd have taken Eddie Danko. Of the two of us, he was the survivor.

But he didn't come out. He just sat down one night, or maybe it was one morning, with his back against a tree and never got up again. I did what I could to bury him, but how can you bury something in a swamp? All the small creatures of the jungle were at his body before I could get out of sight.

After that I walked alone until I came to a river. The

Xingu it was, they tell me now. There I stopped and simply gave up. When the canoe pulled up on shore and the Indians lifted me into it, I thought it was more fever dreams. At the hospital in Belém all they could get out of me was my name and a lot of gibberish.

After a couple of days I came around. The doctor told me I was in fair physical shape, but he was worried about psychological effects. It was true there were holes in my memory, both of the time in the jungle and my life before, but I didn't want to go into it with the doctor. I would be all right once I got home to Anne in my comfortable suburban house in Elgin, Illinois, and picked up my comfortable suburban life.

When they let me talk to Anne on the telephone I was happier than ever in my life, thinking how close I had come to never seeing her again.

"Brian, I'm dying to see you," she said. "Can I fly down there and meet you?"

I happened to be looking at myself in a mirror while I talked on the phone, and with the fever and jungle rot, I wasn't ready to have my wife see me. I said, "No, don't do that. I'll be out of here soon and back home. They just want to put a little meat on my bones first."

"I'll fatten you up good when I get you back here," she said. "Your dad's here waiting to talk to you."

My father came on the line and we tried to be casual and man-to-man, but we were both ready to break out crying.

"Your voice sounds funny, son," he said.

"So does yours," I told him, and all of a sudden we were both laughing like idiots.

"You're sure you don't want somebody to come down there?" he said. "Anne or me?"

"There's no need for that. Just send money."

"That's my boy. Sounds like your college days. I'll wire it right away. Here's Anne."

"When will you be home, darling? I want to have everything ready for you."

"I can't say exactly. But don't do anything special. I just want to walk in and find everything as though I hadn't left. Say, is Ready around?"

"Right here at my feet with his ears up in the air. He must know I'm talking to his master."

"Well, give him a pat for me, and I'll see you all soon."

AS I GREW stronger I asked the doctor about Eddie Danko, if there were any relatives I could go to see.

"I think you are well enough

now to hear the truth about your friend," the doctor said. "We received a wire from the authorities in Chicago telling us that Edward Danko has a criminal record going back to age eleven. When he left town he had some minor connection with a gang there—'bag man' was the term they used. It seems he took with him a large amount of money belonging to the gang. He underestimated how far they would go to find him, and even in Rio they were closing in. As for relatives, if Edward Danko ever had any, they have long ago disowned him."

It was not a complete surprise, of course. I had figured Danko was in some kind of trouble from his hasty arrival and the nervous way he kept looking out the window before we took off. Then there was the satchel he had with him. He hung onto that thing like it contained his soul. Even after we crashed he lugged it along for about a week. Then one day he turned around and pitched it into the swamp. A man's values can change when he's trying to survive in the jungle.

But whatever Eddie Danko was before he stepped onto my airplane, I got to know the man out there in the jungle. I owed him my life. Maybe nobody else would miss him, but a little bit

of Eddie Danko would always live with me.

It was another two weeks before they signed me out of the hospital. By then I was barbered and shaved and looked a good deal more like myself.

I was a little edgy on the flight north. I guess you always are after you've gone down in a plane. But of course nothing went wrong.

It was early evening when I landed at O'Hare in Chicago and grabbed a taxi for the twenty-mile trip to Elgin. The closer we came the more nervous I got. It seemed closer to six years than six months since I had left. As we neared my neighborhood I was reassured to see everything was as I remembered it.

Almost.

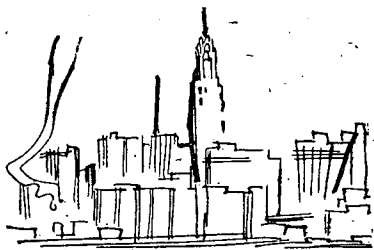
At the edge of my vision I kept catching little things that were not quite as they should be. The shopping center where I'd been a hundred times or more seemed to have shifted its layout, with some of its stores in the wrong location, and others that I was sure hadn't been there before.

We drove past the Methodist church where Anne taught Sunday school. It was much smaller than I remembered.

I leaned back in the seat of the taxi and took a deep breath. For a moment I closed

my eyes, but the jungle started to come back, so I opened them again and looked out to read the street signs.

We turned into my own street and everything was all right again. There was my house—white clapboard with green trim—looking exactly as it had the day I left. It was six-thirty, and Anne would be



just sitting down to dinner. I hoped my father would be there too. Probably I should have called from the airport, but I wanted to savor the surprise.

I paid off the cab driver and started up the walk. Then a snuffling, grinding sound from around the side of the house made me smile. That would be old Ready. I crossed the lawn to the gate in the redwood fence and peered over. It was my dog, all right. He lay back by the doghouse I had built for him three years before, chewing on a huge ham bone. It had

seemed an absurdly large house for such a little pup when I built it, but Ready had quickly grown into it. I reached across to unlatch the gate and pushed it open.

"Ready!" I called. "Hey, fella."

The dog looked up at me with startled brown eyes. Then he sprang to his feet and stood braced and alert.

"Come on, Ready. Don't you know me, boy?"

His ears flattened out and the dog growled deep and mean, showing his strong yellow teeth. Without warning he bounded toward me. Just in time I backed out and slammed the gate between us. Ready slammed his big body against the wooden panels and tried to chew his way through.

Feeling embarrassed and hurt, I backed off and retraced my steps to the front door. A man's dog ought not to forget him in just six months. I thumbed the doorbell and listened to the bing-bong of chimes inside.

Anne opened the door and stood there behind the screen, slim and blonde and so pretty it made me ache. I opened my mouth to speak, but for a moment no words would come.

"Yes?" Anne's voice was cool. Her eyes looked at me but didn't see me.

"Hey, is that the best you can do?"

"What is it you want, please?"

"Anne, cut it out, I've already had one scare with Ready."

"Is something wrong?" A man's voice spoke from inside the house, and my father walked up to stand behind my wife. He frowned out at me.

"Dad, if you people are playing a joke, I've had enough. Can I please come in?"

"I don't know you," my father said.

"You don't. . . what?"

"Who are you, anyway? What do you want here?"

My throat tightened up and I struggled for breath. "I-I'm Brian Cummings. I'm your son. Anne, I'm your husband. I haven't changed that much, have I?"

Anne made a strangled sound and turned away.

My father said, "I don't know what you're trying to do, young man, but I don't appreciate it one bit. My son is in a hospital in Brazil, and we're expecting him home any day now. Please do us a favor and go away."

"But, Dad, that was me in the hospital. I called you from Belém. You sent me the money to get home. What are you doing to me?"

Anne ran back into the house. My father spoke in a

low, tight voice. "Now you listen to me, mister. My daughter-in-law has been through a rough time, and whatever your purpose is, it's in very bad taste. Get out of here now before I call the police."

He stepped back.

The door of my home slammed, closing me out. Sweat broke out all over my body and I began to shiver the way I had with the jungle fever.

I walked away from there. I don't know how long I walked, or how far. It was dark when I found a taxi. I had him take me back to Chicago and I went into a bar there. I had never been a drinker, but I needed something badly that would blot out the pictures in my head.

Liquor helped. After a few drinks I couldn't think straight

any more, and that's what I wanted. The sights and sounds of the city got all mixed up with the jungle and with Eddie Danko and with my life the way it used to be. I moved from one bar to another until I found myself in the rat trap on the south side where there was the bartender named Fritz.

A heavy hand dropped on my shoulder. I turned on the bar stool and looked into a dark face that I knew, yet didn't know.

"Well, look who's here," the dark man said. "I didn't believe it when Fritz called. You got to be crazy to come back here after we all thought you were dead." He pulled me off the stool and spun me around to face the door. "Let's go. There are people waiting to see you, Eddie."

Next Month:

ACCUSE ME, PLEASE

A Story of Method & Murder

by LAWRENCE TREAT

"Murder, though it hath no tongue, yet shall speak . . ." So wrote the Bard of Avon — though even he didn't know how loudly death spoke!

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JANUARY, 1975

THE SCIENTIST AND THE MISSING PISTOL

The body, a witness and one locked door; it stumped the cops, but Grey knew it only had to be seen to be solved.

by **ARTHUR PORGES**

CYRIACK SKINNER GREY spent much of his physical life in a wheelchair, but mentally he was unbounded. He delighted in probable inferences drawn from factual data, had immense expertise in science and a free-ranging imagination more typical of a poet.

Right now he pressed a stud in one arm of his chair and nearby there was a faint hissing, a melodic gurgle, and the fragrance of fine coffee, carefully brewed. It was black, mel-

low, and strong enough to deck Giant Despair in round one.

Lieutenant Trask, smiling his thanks, took the tiny ceramic mug, and sipped eagerly. He was tired and rather depressed, as any dedicated cop would be when somebody seemed likely to get away with murder.

"Now," Grey said, "what's the problem?"

It was amazing, Trask reflected, not for the first time, how this scientist, once a top electronics engineer and all-around guru of the physical world and its laws, had made the transition to informal, usually unpaid, crime consultant. He wondered if the city fathers would ever realize how lucky they were to have a man like Grey on tap. And how vitally the man functioned, even from a wheelchair.

Grey had drawn from another recess in his chair, designed by himself with an eye both to efficiency and sybaritic indulgence, a crystal flask of brandy which he tasted with obvious relish, watching the detective a bit quizzically. Being on duty, Trask, he knew, would prefer to skip alcohol.

"Right up your alley," Trask said. "A locked room case, so help me. Guy shot dead in an office with only one other man there—and no gun to be found."

"Ah," Grey said, brightening unashamedly. To him killing was bad, but once done it couldn't be prevented, and while murder was deplorable, a homicide—a less emotional word!—was good; it stretched the mind and helped one forget his useless legs.

"Who shot whom?" Grey asked. "And with what?"

"I suspect," the lieutenant said, typically cautious, emphasizing the verb, "that Steve Duggan killed his business partner, Keven McCallum. But there's no proof at all. As to the gun, that could have been a pistol or a rifle."

"Caliber?"

"A .22 firing a Long Rifle, which, as you know, is a much underrated little slug. Deadly at short range, and can carry well over a mile. Went deep into McCallum's skull from far enough away to leave no powder burns—but that doesn't need more than a few feet, so Duggan certainly could have done it there in the office."

"Why couldn't he have gotten rid of the gun?"

"Well," Trask said slowly, organizing his thoughts, "there's just the one door to their private office. Outside is a bigger room, full of typists, clerks, errand-boys, about thrity busy people. The firm, *Space-Age Plastics*, I should say, does

about four million dollars' or more worth of business annually."

According to Duggan, what happened was this. McCallum told him he was into the Mob for over \$80,000 in gambling debts, and that they'd kill him if he didn't pay up soon. Then he admitted tapping the till for about \$50,000 of that. Like Duggan, he's a good accountant and business expert, and had access to the books, of course.

"Anyhow, they agreed the best thing was for McCallum to write it all out, sort of confession, then call the police in for protection. He'd have to resign, but Duggan offered to let the fifty thousand go for now, and not prosecute.

"So McCallum sat down at his desk to begin, when suddenly he slumped in the chair, shot dead by a bullet through the open window, or so Duggan claims. Seeing McCallum was done for, no pulse or other signs of life, Duggan ran out to the main office yelling for somebody to call the police."

"No phone inside?" Grey demanded.

"Just what I wondered about," the detective said quickly. "Damn right. Who ever heard of two V.I.P.'s without phones, even a row of buttons, in their office? But Duggan was rattled, he says, and

didn't think about anything but rushing for help."

"Could happen," the scientist admitted. "People do crazy things, as we both know. Could he have slipped the gun to somebody in the main office, or taken it out of the building himself?"

"Absolutely not. Too many people were watching him in the big room, and he never left that until long after the police came and everybody was searched and questioned."

"What about the open window you mentioned?"

"Seemed the only solution at first, but below is Hartmann Plaza, and it was crawling with people then. Lunchtime, you see. All over, lying on the grass, feeding pigeons, eating from bags. You couldn't drop an empty cartridge down there and not have somebody spot it falling."

"Why do you reject Duggan's explanation—the bullet through the window? You must have a reason."

"I do. First of all, they had been quarreling for months. Duggan wanted to sell to a big outfit, but McCallum wouldn't have it. And both would have to agree. Then there's McCallum's wife. She says he didn't act like a guy in trouble with the Mob or deep in debt. Sure, people have kept such

things from wives before, but Duggan did have a motive."

"What about the embezzlement part; did that prove out?"

"You bet." Trask frowned. "But, again, what if Duggan was the thief? If he could eliminate his partner, sell the firm for a big profit, and at the same time cover his own stealing—"

"If you're right," the scientist said slowly, "he staked a lot on losing that pistol. It couldn't have been a rifle," he added, "since that would really be tough to dispose of in a hurry."

"My feeling, too," Trask said. He grinned sheepishly. "You know, I even thought of a case in Laguna Beach some years back, where a guy used a balloon full of hydrogen to carry off a .25 caliber automatic he'd murdered his wife with. But he could count on the balloon going down in the sea, whereas here it would probably land in some solid citizen's yard! Too risky."

"I assume, then," Grey said, a twinkle in his deep-set eyes, "you'd like to have me find a gun in that private office. And after you and a dozen eager experts have taken it apart."

The lieutenant looked around hopefully. "Where's that midget genius you pretend is a fourteen-year-old kid?" he asked, referring to Edgar Grey,

the scientist's son, who had an I. Q. of 180, sharp eyes, enormous chutzpa, and little reverence except for Isaac Newton, James Clerk Maxwell, and Charles Darwin. Plus a bit for Dad.

"Off to camp," Grey told him. "You're out of luck there; we're on our own. He'll probably find a new species of insect; he usually does at camp, and tries to get it named after him. Bound to happen before long. But, as I said, it's up to us; no assistant!"

"Well, I did bring a bunch of pictures, the usual big glossies, of the offices; and transcripts of all the important testimony. Maybe if you go over those—"

"Naturally," the scientist said. "But first, I know you're suspicious of Duggan; but you're also competent and must have checked on any buildings from which somebody might have fired into the office."

"That's right, and it's another fuzzy point. A really good marksman with a telescopic sight might have managed it from from high-rise across the plaza, but even at lunchtime the rooms with possible angles were occupied. Simply no way for anybody to have fired from there."

"I can't say it's impossible," he added frankly, "because nothing is 100% airtight, and maybe some one office was va-

cant for x minutes and some fast operator rushed to a window for a quick shot, but I just say not bloody likely!"

Grey was studying the large photos. He cocked his massive head. "The two planters stand out," he said in a dry voice. "One on each side of the door." He didn't make it a question; there was no need.

"First thing we searched," Trask assured him woodenly. "They're concrete; would take Paul Bunyan to push anything into those roots, believe me. But we probed, as I said."

"Very well," Grey said. "I'll go over all these data, and if I get any ideas you'll hear from me."

"Fine," Trask said. "From you that's almost a guarantee." He smiled.

The scientist raised one eyebrow. "You expect too many miracles," he said. "I'm bound to miss one of these days, so don't call this case solved just yet."

"I won't," the detective said, grinning. "I'll only relax enough to get some sleep. First in three days," he added, yawning cavernously.

"Before you go to that well-earned rest," Grey said, "a couple of final questions, although I'm sure of the answers."

"Shoot."

"I assume both rooms were



sealed off or guarded once you'd searched everybody."

"Absolutely. If Duggan stashed a gun in either office, it's still there. Except that it isn't; can't be, can it?" Trask asked, almost piteously.

"Even a small .22 is pretty big. Yes," Grey said, suddenly philosophical. "Today when most things you buy fall apart minutes after the warranty expires, it's interesting to note how functional and durable and really well-made a good pistol is. What that implies, I won't say—now. Get some sleep," he ordered. "I can see you obviously need it."

"Wilco, over, and out!" Trask said crisply, and left.

Until late that night Grey studied the photos and read the reports. He saw the end of a drapery rod over the window, and thought of a zip-gun. Any

hollow tube would serve; even kids made them in slums. And a .22 is the easiest round to handle in such a make-shift. But something to close the breech was needed; surely Trask wouldn't have missed any improvised contraption fitting the rod—if it was even hollow . . .

He read more reports; testimony, contents of the offices, what was in the waste-baskets. Suddenly his gaze sharpened. What were *those* doing among the papers and empty envelopes?

When he got to his office the next morning at eight, Trask found that Grey had already phoned, asking him to call immediately on arriving. Eagerly the detective complied.

"Got something?" he demanded the instant Grey answered.

"Maybe," was the measured reply. "Tell me, how long was it after the shooting before you made a thorough search of the inner office."

There was a fairly long pause.

"Well, we had a lot of questions and general conversation first. At least ten hours. After all, I had no reason to doubt Duggan's story about an outside shot. With all the noise from machines in the main room, nobody could be sure of

hearing a shot. A .22 isn't very loud."

"What I'd like," the scientist said, "is a comparison of the two planters. Could you have them measured inside and out and then weighed. Without the plants, of course."

"The planters? But why? They're empty, and I probed—" He stopped suddenly. He should know better. Grey didn't make idle suggestions. "I'll have it done immediately," he snapped.

"Do that, and call me back." And Grey hung up.

The return call came two hours later.

"Had trouble finding accurate scales big enough," Trask told him. "But you scored. One is over two pounds heavier and three inches less deep."

"Ah," Grey breathed. "I think, can't promise, mind you, but I think you'll find a pistol under concrete in the heavy one." When the detective didn't say anything, Grey went on. "Duggan probably brought some ready-mix concrete to the office in a small bag; wouldn't need more than a pound or so. He pulled out one of the plants and made a wet layer of the stuff about two inches thick. Takes some time to harden. So he had plenty of time to shoot McCallum and bury the gun in the soft concrete. He could count on its setting pretty well

long before you got around to a thorough search. His story of what happened, murder by organized crime, and all the testimony from people in the offices; that was bound to take time. Naturally, when you looked into the planters, what with their inside bottoms damp and soiled from dirt, you didn't suspect—who would?—that the solid base of one was deceptive, and a little too thick. It was quite clever."

"Hang on; it's right here," Trask said. "I'll break it open."

"I was about to suggest that," the scientist said, then grinned, aware that nobody was listening now.

Ten minutes later Trask came back on the phone. "Bull's eye!" he said. "A .22 Cobra, big as life. Even other shells in it—in case one wasn't enough, I suppose. How the devil did you guess?"

"It wasn't all that chancy," Grey said rather brusquely. "It was those plant clippings in the wastebasket. Why would somebody like Duggan, important

and busy, be trimming a decorative shrub all of a sudden?

"Then I realized he'd do just that if one was not noticeably taller than the other. Somebody might spot it, and wonder. The raised bottom, you see. So he had to prune the top of the plant down just enough to even the two up again. Which meant the gun probably had to be in the concrete—right?"

"If you say so," Trask admitted in a hollow voice. A querulous note emerged; he was still exhausted. "But how did you figure it? I mean, see things the rest of us look past, or around—?"

"Don't blame yourself," Grey told him gently. "Most of me's immobile, so my eyes and imagination have to do more. By the way, Edgar called, quite excited—for him. He did discover a new insect—a kind of pine wood engraver beetle unknown before. So there may yet be a *Pityogenes Greyii* in the catalogs!" And well pleased with his probable inferences, Cyriack Skinner Grey hung up.



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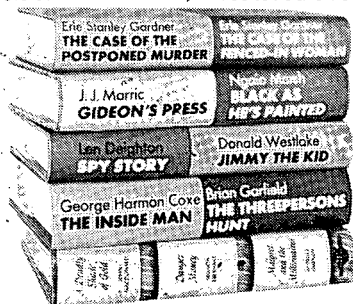
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